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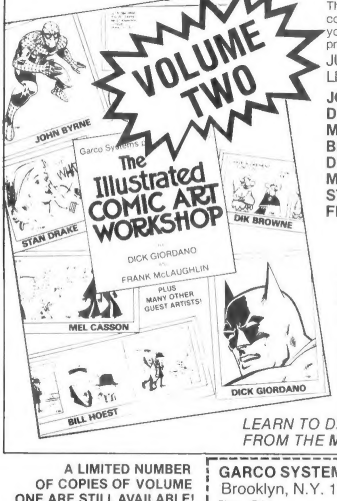

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art
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colors

FONTES & FRIENDS
saps

thanks for the gracious gift, gang!

Art: Jim Salicrup

UP FRONT

Well, the verdict is in: COMICS INTERVIEW #1 received a warm welcome from one and all! Thanks to your enthusiastic reception, our energies have been renewed — nay, redoubled — in the most literal sense of the word.

We're going monthly!

It takes my breath away even to think about how we're going to find enough hours in the day and enough days in the week — INTERVIEW is an after-hours labor of love for us — but, rest assured, we're going to do it. I haven't had this much fun in a long while!

The format has undergone some fine-tuning . . . for instance, this time around **Mark Evanier's** interview is doubling for both writer and editor, and we'll be alternating colorists and letterers for a while. Remember the 18 regular and semi-regular departments I mentioned last issue? Well, the only problem is fitting them all in — there's so much going on in comics these days and so many people I want to talk to that, even monthly, I don't know where we're going to find the space. But considering the favorable response from readers, distributors, fellow professionals, publishers and advertisers, maybe we'll be able to add more pages in the future. With your support, we can do it.

Next issue **P. Craig Russell** and **Don McGregor** talk about the triumphant revival of Marvel's science-fiction superhero, KILLRAVEN — and Craig's done a beautiful color cover starring the Warrior of the Worlds. Not only that, but we salute STAR WARS artist **Howard Chaykin's** new hero, AMERICAN FLAGG, with an exclusive interview. And there's lots more.

Remember: COMICS INTERVIEW is the voice of comics!

Talk to you next month!

-Dave

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"If you intend to die, you can do anything."

FRANK MILLER'S RONIN

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Early one winter evening, Jim Salicrup and I sauntered over from the Marvel Bullpen to nearby Upstart Associates, the westside Manhattan studio where Miller sometimes works. Taking time out from a frantic schedule, long-and-lanky Frank plunked himself down in a battered old armchair for a long talk about his sensational new series, the one everyone's been waiting for since his departure from DAREDEVIL. While Jim and I flipped through penciled pages from the first two issues, Frank answered our questions about his intriguing new character, RONIN . . .

JIM SALICRUP: *Why don't we just start at the beginning — how did you come up with RONIN?*

FRANK MILLER: I had pieces of the idea floating around in my head while I was working on DAREDEVIL. The pieces started coming together six or eight months before I left DAREDEVIL. RONIN was built very slowly, very deliberately. Given the format, and the importance of the story to me, it had to be.

DAK: *But you first had the idea while you were working in DAREDEVIL?*

FRANK: Right, Dave. I came up with the concept and characters as a result of research I did for DAREDEVIL.

JIM: *How would you describe RONIN?*

FRANK: I guess I'd call it a science fiction/sword-and-sorcery/urban nightmare/samurai drama.

DAK: *How did you present it to DC?*

FRANK: Jenette Kahn invited me over to her office to discuss my doing some work for them, and I more or less laid out

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Frank Miller
Occupation: Cartoonist
Residence: Manhattan
Born: January 1957, Montpelier, Vermont.
Credits: Gold Key horror jobs, DAREDEVIL, WOLVERINE
Favorite Comic: KOZURE OKAMI by Kazvo Koike, writer, and Goseke Kojima, artist.
Pet Peeve: Filling out questionaires.

"Ronin is the masterless samurai, the fallen

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to her the idea behind RONIN and the jumbled notes I'd put together for the plot. She went for it in a big way. We talked energetically for four hours about format, business, history, philosophy — you name it. And I decided I'd found a publisher for RONIN.

JIM: *What kind of research were you doing that started with DAREDEVIL and ended up as RONIN?*

FRANK: It started back — way back — when **Denny O'Neil** first took over editing DAREDEVIL. He encouraged me to develop a believable fighting style for Daredevil. To do that, I started studying Kung Fu movies and various forms of the martial arts. That led to further study of some of the more cerebral and spiritual aspects of the martial arts. Eventually, I started focusing on Japanese material more than on Chinese, primarily on the samurai. As I got deeper into it, I found certain things in the ethic of the samurai that related to life the modern world. I discovered connections, and worked toward creating a character that could illustrate those connections. An example of how applicable samurai thinking is to the modern world is that THE BOOK OF FIVE RINGS, which is considered the final word on the samurai, written by the greatest samurai, **Musashi**, is used by Japanese businessmen to develop business tactics. **Musashi's** thought transends simple physical combat.

DAK: *I received a review copy of that, and to this day I don't know why, but it just showed up about two years ago. It's pretty well traveled — it's gotten in some strange circles.*

FRANK: Yeah. (Laughter.) Even comics.

JIM: *What is the samurai ethic?*

FRANK: You got a week? (Laughter.) What we were talking about is Bushido — the way of the warrior. It's a life style, a philosophy that enabled feudal Japan to produce a nearly perfect warrior. Of course, they had lots of time — hundreds and hundreds of years of war — to get that act together. And I think that the cultural and geographic distances between us and Japan allows us to enjoy how nifty they looked, without concerning the fact that it was a militarist, fascist order as corrupt as any other. The aspect of the samurai that intrigues me most is the ronin, the masterless samurai, the fallen warrior. Ronin, translated, means "wave man," a man tossed about by fate, unaffiliated, dishonored, disenfranchised. This entire project comes from my feelings that we, modern men, are ronin. We're kind of cut loose. I don't get the feeling from the people I know, the people I see on the street, that they have something greater than themselves to believe in. Patriotism, religion, whatever — they've all lost their meaning for us. That's the heart of the series, and the connection I draw between feudal Japan and twentieth-century America.

JIM: *What time period is RONIN set in, Frank?*

FRANK: About forty or fifty years from now, and ten years into an unspeakably horrible depression. It takes place in Manhattan, but it's a Manhattan with no business left, a Manhattan that has become a barbarian society. That's where RONIN spends the first part of the series.

DAK: *After that, it changes?*

FRANK: Yes.

JIM: *How much background and research material was used for the stories? Do you personally believe in the samurai ethic?*

FRANK: I believe that the samurai were amazing warriors. I can't say that I actually adhere to any of their codes. I don't think it's life oriented or happiness oriented. (Laughter.) But they were amazing fighters. The slogan for the series — "if you intend to die, you can do anything" — is more or less my distillation of what I think the basic attitude was. **Musashi** preached that the warrior must regard himself as a corpse, so he would not be afraid of dying. So that he wouldn't hesitate in battle, but attack intelligently and fiercely. It is significant that Kendo consists of very few defense moves — that when attacked, the samurai would seek to strike out in time with the opponent and dismember or kill him rather than back off. This fatalism is particularly Eastern. I think that the Eastern attitude toward life and death has enabled them to generally be able to produce finer warriors, warriors more ready to kill without doubt or regret. There's no commandment that Thou Shalt Not Kill, which the West is saddled with. The Eastern religions are much more flexible in nature, much more complex. There isn't any guilt attached to killing at the right place and the right time. The RONIN — the hero of the series — is the product of that culture, and those philosophies. So he isn't quite in tune with modern New York.

JIM: In structuring a story, how faithful to the philosophy are you, or do you take liberties for the sake of the story?

FRANK: I take many liberties with any research material, Jim. I really don't want it to tell me what to do. As far as the philosophy, I believe I make a sincere effort to represent it, but invisibly. I'm talking about the thinking that goes be-

warrior. We modern men are ronin."

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These two pages: Panel art by Miller from the first issue of RONIN.

hind lines of dialog or emotional reactions that you might not even notice. My characters don't give speeches. This isn't going to be the KUNG FU TV show. It's all very far back there, research that I have done in order to develop and understand the character. But the character is presented as you might meet him, without his background. There are no thought balloons in the series, no captions. All you get are word balloons and pictures, and the hero doesn't talk much. He has to be judged by his actions.

DAK: *Would you say his philosophy is the theme of the series?*

FRANK: No, his personality is. The theme of the series is disenfranchisement. No longer having something to believe in. It's represented in nearly every character in the series. A very prominent character is Casey, a corporate cop, who is essentially a modern-day samurai. Her loyalty to the corporation is like that of a samurai to his lord.

DAK: *Are there other strong characters and do you consider this in a general sense to fall into the superhero category — meaning, will Ronin go up against strong villains?*

FRANK: It's very hard to classify. Yes, it is a superhero strip, because it does have a strong central character who does amazing things. But it doesn't fit any particular super-hero formula that I know of. And the ronin is not always heroic or virtuous — as we define virtue. It's a superhero strip in the same way that THE ODYSSEY is a superhero story or YOJIMBO is a superhero story. It's an adventure about a man who can do extraordinary things. But there is no skintight costume.

DAK: So there are no super-villains, per se?

FRANK: Well, there isn't any RONIN revenge squad, but there is a villain. A real down-home mean and nasty sumbitch.

JIM: *Judging from the actual look of RONIN, it's very different from DAREDEVIL. You're doing the writing, penciling and inking — who's coloring and lettering the book?*

FRANK: Lynn Varley is coloring and **John Costanza** is lettering.

JIM: *How did the whole look evolve? Was it a conscious effort?*

FRANK: Very conscious. I studied samurai comics published in Japan extensively, particularly KOZURE OKAMI. Translated it means A WOLF AND HIS CUB. I find that the story and artwork are wonderful. The artist and writer do a better job of storytelling than anything I've seen here in the U.S. Period. KOZURE OKAMI has never been translated into English, but I can flip through these 250 page monsters —

DAK: *Sort of the Russian novels of comics!*

FRANK: — and I can read 250 pages, not knowing Japanese, and never get confused, because the visual storytelling is so perfect.

DAK: *That's incredible.*

FRANK: It's amazing work. Beyond the storytelling, there is the actual style of the linework, which excites me. I haven't tried to outright imitate it — but it's been a very strong influence.

DAK: *Do you think not just your linework, but your method of storytelling, has changed?*

FRANK: I really hope so. I hope that when RONIN comes out, people resist the temptation to compare it too much to DAREDEVIL, because it's really apples and oranges. The style of writing is different, the storytelling is different, everything is different right down the line. DAREDEVIL owed mostly to old movies — the '40s and '50s movies — for its tone and RONIN draws from a variety of different sources. The other thing about the artwork that I want to mention in particular, is that most of what I'm doing right now is changing my art style to accomodate better printing. I've found that when the paper is white, most of what comic-book inking is no longer works. The heavy blacks and the bold outlines produce too slick a look for good paper. The style of inking that we do in comics now is designed to compensate for bad printing. And as the printing gets better, we have to change our whole approach to rendering, so that we're playing against the quality of the printing rather than

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"RONIN is taking longer to do than DARE

trying to bring it up. We have to soften our image, because the resolution is so fine. Luckily, I've got **Lynn Varley** coloring the book. She has an understanding of better reproduction, and an imagination and expertise with color that makes her contribution a crucial part of the project. Remember back when inkers were thought of as just people who darkened the penciller's lines? Then along came **Terry Austin** and **Klaus Janson** to show how important a stage inking is. Well, I think that RONIN and Lynn will demonstrate the importance of coloring — especially now that the production values are being raised.

JIM: *How closely do you work with the colorist and letterer? Are you editing RONIN, too?*

FRANK: Yes. Lynn and I confer on the parts of her job that overlap with mine. That is, the emotional context of the scene, or what time of day it is, or like that. But she knows much more about color than I do, and she brings a very sophisticated approach to RONIN. So mostly I stay out of her way. The color is her province.

JIM: *Are you designing the word balloon shapes yourself, too?*

FRANK: Yeah. I lay in the lettering in pencil, after I've typed up the script. **John Costanza** puts down the letters on the page, while I do the panel borders and the balloon shapes, because I want the whole thing to be as organic as possible. The particular style of panel borders and balloon shapes I'm doing I wouldn't ask anyone else to do.

DAK: *How has your method of working changed? With DAREDEVIL, toward the end, you did very rough thumbnails.*

FRANK: Layouts on typewriter-size paper.

DAK: *And Klaus Janson pretty much did the finishes. On RONIN, do you write it first or do you do thumbnails first?*

FRANK: I've gotten very traditional. I write myself a full script, now.

DAK: *So, even with yourself, you don't work Marvel style?*

FRANK: No. I write a script, with the number of panels per page and dialogue indicated. After I've written the script, I play around with it quite a bit and break it into different sequences. I don't have any real hard-and-fast rules. I'll get an idea halfway through the job to change the ending. It happened in the first two issues of RONIN. I've deleted major scenes or completely turned them around.

JIM: *How have you adjusted to the longer story length, Frank?*

FRANK: That's been what's excited me the most, Jim. It's allowing me to do so much more with the characters. I still favor, in the pacing of the stories, to get each scene as tight as I can, so there isn't any draggy excess. You know how it is when you watch a movie, and a scene goes on for a couple extra minutes — you get bored.

DAK: *Did you see CONAN, the movie?*

FRANK: Yeah. Like that. I still believe in cropping them, but every once in a while there's a moment that you really want to stretch out. There's a scene in #2 where Ronin is beaten and left lying in the garbage, and I leave him there for two pages. It's something I might not feel free enough to do, if not for the longer page length, but it more thoroughly gets across the pain than it would otherwise. Also, there's simply room to do a great deal more and get deeper inside the characters. I can have a protagonist who doesn't talk hardly at all. I can show enough of his actions so that he becomes an understandable character, rather than a cardboard stand-up. Also, very simply, there's more plot. I can advance things much further.

DAK: *RONIN is on Baxter paper?*

FRANK: Probably better than that. Each issue is 48 pages, with no ads. There are six issues.

DAK: *And RONIN comes out —*

FRANK: Every six weeks.

DAK: *An odd publishing schedule.*

FRANK: I'm kind of charged up by the fact that we've worked out a format and publishing schedule around the creative needs of the project, and not *vice versa.*

JIM: *The sensible approach.*

FRANK: Yeah. We — **Dick Giordano** and I — worked out what this project had to be, to tell the story the best way. We really worked out a production schedule and format to accommodate RONIN, specifically. It's a much better way to do it. That way I don't have ten extra pages to fill — or not enough room to do what I want to.

DAK: *Has DC had any input, Frank, or do they see each issue only when you finish it?*

FRANK: I show it at various stages to Dick and we talk it over. I'm being given

Frank's pencil art for RONIN #2.

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DEVIL . . . it's much more important to me."

Photo: Eliot Brown

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". . . it's my ass that's on the line."

an awfully free hand, which is very good, I think. I have the duties of editor, writer, artist, and that involves a lot of checking on myself. I'm not out in the world alone with this thing, but I do have the kind of autonomy that I really looked forward to having. It's really encouraging, it's really exciting, it's very fulfilling— all that, because it's my ass that's on the line.

DAK: *I know you became pretty good friends with Denny O'Neil when you were working on DAREDEVIL. Has he had any input on RONIN?*

FRANK: It's funny, I haven't shown any of it to him, because both of us have been so busy with our different jobs. I intend to. My working with him on DAREDEVIL had a lot to do with me conceiving the RONIN project, because he was the one who encouraged me to study all that Eastern martial arts stuff.

JIM: *What happens after the sixth issue? Is there a definite ending?*

FRANK: There is a *definite* ending.

JIM: *Will there be more RONIN adventures after that?*

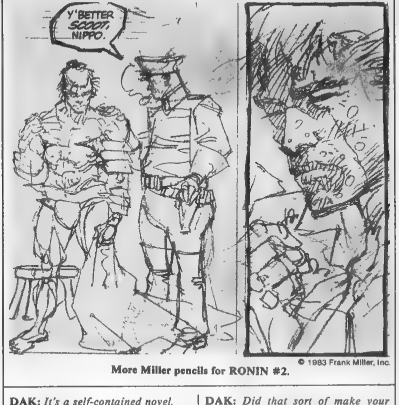
FRANK: My feeling is that it's a contained, closed series.

JIM: *You wouldn't want to do any more?*

FRANK: I don't think so. One of the things I like about a closed series like this is that it makes everything possible. Heroes can become villains, anybody can die, or anybody can change, or anybody can retire, and I don't have to be bound to producing twelve issues of RONIN FAMILY next year.

DAK: *You said something before the interview, Frank, about how the series has lots of changes in it, and people may think that it's one thing and find out it's another . . .*

FRANK: Yeah. That's one of the reasons why I'm reticent to talk about the plot at any great length, because *many* things change in the course of the series. I'm most interested in the development of the character across time. My main frustration with superhero comics, in general, is that fundamentally heroes can't change. Particularly, heroes that have been around a long time. One of my frustrations with DAREDEVIL was that, no matter what I did to him, he still had to be Daredevil, he had to be the good guy, he couldn't do certain things. I couldn't push him right to the limit, I could never have him really be changed by anything. In this case, I can do anything to these characters. There's just no end to what can be done with them. And I have 300 pages to put them through everything that they can go through.



More Miller pencils for RONIN #2.

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DAK: *It's a self-contained novel.*

FRANK: Yeah.

JIM: *Are there any plans for RONIN in any other media?*

FRANK: There are no plans, presently.

JIM: *Would you like to see anything?*

FRANK: Well, I fluctuate a lot on that.

JIM: *Probably not a Saturday morning cartoon . . .*

FRANK: (Laughter.) No, not a Saturday morning cartoon. My feeling right now is that I'm really into it as a comic book, and I'm really into comics right now. Anything else is kind of unreal to me, as far as this series, because it was dreamed up to be a comic book. If it turns into something later, I hope it's done well.

DAK: *Do you have any say in what might become of RONIN, if it were to go into other media?*

FRANK: Some. I can't really go into that much, Dave. The arrangement I have with DC is pretty involved. I am satisfied that if anything did come of it I'd be closely consulted.

DAK: *Which issue of DAREDEVIL do you consider the best you've done?*

FRANK: I felt the last issue I did was the best of the series. I was very proud of it.

DAK: *Did that sort of make your statement? Did you plan up to that point, knowing you were getting off the series?*

FRANK: I sure knew by the last two that I was going fast, yeah. In fact, my feeling was that after #191, the one where he was in the hospital with Bullseye, he went home and hung up his costume, and went on to be a lawyer for the rest of his life. I really felt that that was the end of my involvement with the character. In my own head, he retired right then. I'm sure the people writing it now don't agree with me. (Laughter.)

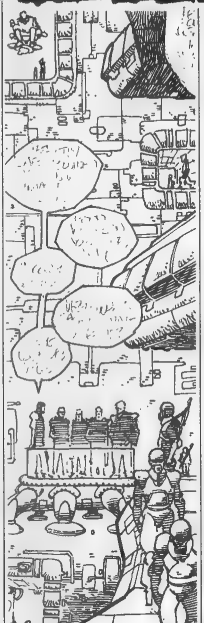
DAK: *There's no chance of seeing you back at some point on DAREDEVIL?*

FRANK: No.

JIM: *What are the things you hope to accomplish with RONIN, like the DAREDEVIL issues you're proud of?*

FRANK: I'm not uniformly proud of my work on DAREDEVIL. I gave it a sincere effort, straight through — but it was sort of a chaotic experience. I came onto the book thinking I was doing a couple of fill-ins on the writing. I ended up taking over the series, had a character who was only supposed to appear for an issue take over the series on me — Elektra. A story came out of that that was very involved, but it wasn't all planned in advance, and it wasn't as

"There is humor in RONIN. It's black."



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Above: Scene from RONIN #1. Opposite and over: Two pages of pencils from #2.

carefully constructed in advance as the RONIN book is. And because DAREDEVIL was part of a larger Marvel mythology, there were many limits as to what I could do with it. Also, much of my work on DAREDEVIL represents a very awkward, early period for me. Still, I gave it every ounce. And it had some moments. My goals in RONIN are mainly to get the story across, to make it as exciting as I can, as involving as I can, and also to hone my craft as much through it as I can. That's what I seek out of the project. However, I'd hope that it will be as experimental and and formative for me as DAREDEVIL was. In fact, I think it may be more so.

JIM: *You said that on the first and second issues of RONIN, even though this was the most tightly structured material you've worked on, halfway through each you changed the plots. What happens if you get halfway through the whole self-contained RONIN saga and you decide to change it?*

FRANK: Then I'll change it.

DAK: *Can you talk about what the ending for RONIN #1 was before? And why you changed it?*

FRANK: Oh, yeah. As it stood before, the story didn't build to quite such a crescendo. There was no explosion, no demon shot across the city. I'd planned a brief skirmish between the demon and the Ronin, from which Virgo rescued the Ronin. But, as I was working on that sequence, I realized that I had been building and building tension across the story and hadn't done anything to release it. The feeling of the story, as my hands were on it, was that it needed something *big* to happen there, something to release the tension. And, as it turns out, this actually works out as not only a more dramatic scene, but as a much more visually exciting one. It's the appearance of the Ronin at the end that brings back the ominous tone, that builds the tension again.

You need to change tone, to change mood. Anything — drama, tension, humor, you name it — can get tedious if it isn't contrasted with something else.

Often the most effective scenes in a story come from playing humor off horror, or *vice-versa*. I'm much more in touch with this when I'm executing the story than when I'm plotting it. So I've taught myself to take liberties with my own material.

There is a brief scene in the middle of the story, where the Ronin saves a woman and a child. Originally, that scene was much longer. He had an episode with the woman and the child. It was kind of an adventure within an adventure. I found that, although it was rather a nice little story within the story, it was distracting. And, without offering anything integral to the plot, it broke the rhythm of the tension I was building across the story, so I deleted it — which gave me more room to do the crescendo at the end.

DAK: *At what point did you decide on the change — after you'd written it or after you'd drawn it?*

FRANK: While I was drawing it. Particularly at the beginning of a series, there's a lot of that.

DAK: *Then you are, in fact, acting as an editor on your own work, having yourself make changes?*

FRANK: Yes. I rewrite and throw out pages all the time. The particular way I'm inking RONIN, I have to be really spontaneous, and when you work that way, it's easier to make mistakes. So, if it doesn't work out, I just toss it away and start over, and make it come out better the next time. That way the look is energetic and the artwork doesn't look too self-involved or constipated.

JIM: *I remember when you were penciling DAREDEVIL, Frank, it took you a long time to do every page. Has this method of doing RONIN affected your speed?*

FRANK: RONIN is taking longer to do than DAREDEVIL did. It's that much more important to me. DAREDEVIL was very important to me while I was doing it, but it wasn't as entirely mine as this. I created RONIN and I'm doing more of it than I did of DAREDEVIL. And I feel much more connected and committed. This product will have to sell itself. It hasn't got anything else bolstering it. It's not part of the Marvel mythology, it's not a previously established superhero character. It's either going to sell for what it is, or it's not going to sell at all, so I'm much more *aware* of it.

DAK: *And you are, indeed closely identified with the project. After all, it is FRANK MILLER'S RONIN . . .*

FRANK: Right!

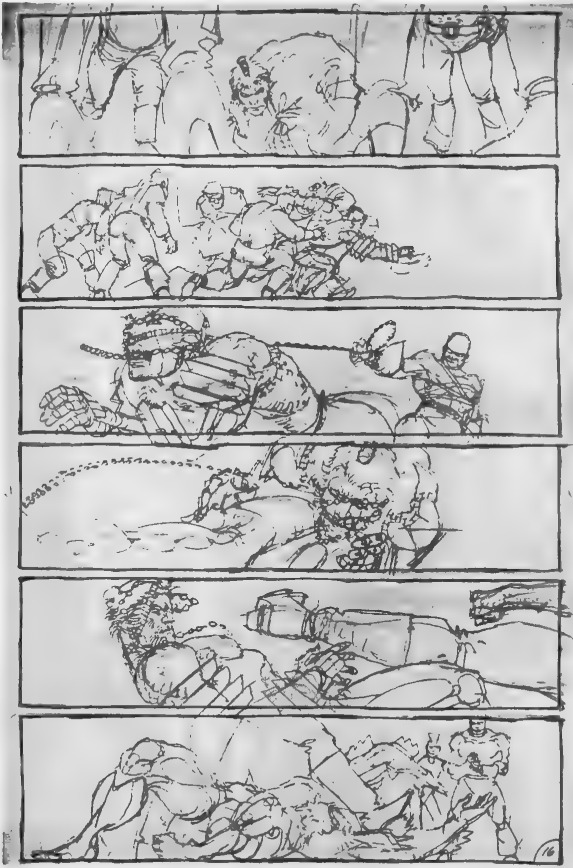
JIM: *How do you like working here in a studio with other artists?*

FRANK: I like it.

DAK: *Who all works here at Upstart Associates?*

FRANK: Walt Simonson, Howard Chaykin and **Jim Sherman.**

DAK: *I've always envied artists, because at least if you're drawing you can talk to people while you work. But*



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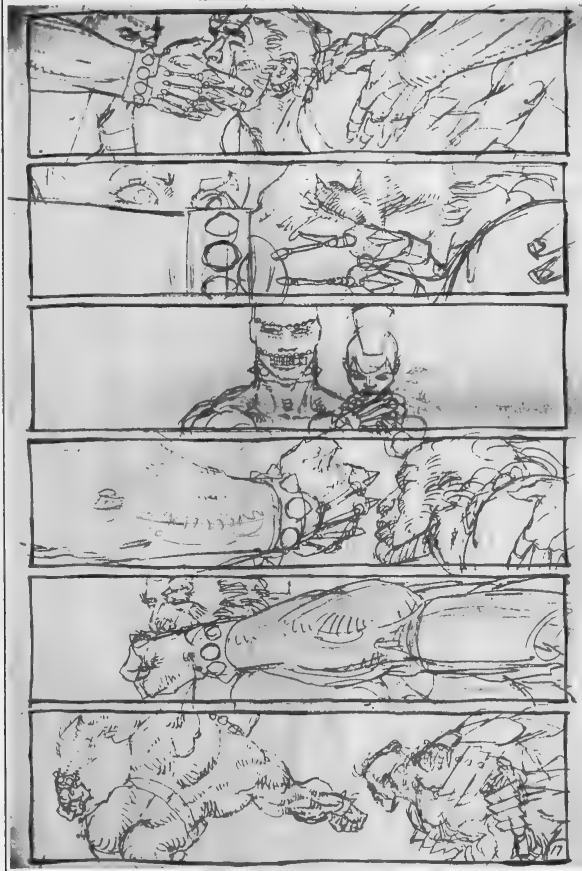

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"Writing is more intense, much harder . . ."

you absolutely can't get other verbal input while you're trying to write . . .

FRANK: Absolutely. You can't listen to any kind of music that involves lyrics — at least, I can't. I know that some writers watch TV while they write. I don't understand how they do it.

DAK: *Neither do I.*

FRANK: I sometimes listen to classical music while I'm writing but, generally, writing is much more intense, I think, than doing anything else in this business. It's much more brain work, it's much harder, and it takes a lot longer. I can draw for twelve hours and feel okay, but if I write for six, my brain is completely fatigued.

JIM: *When I write, even the hum of the electric typewriter can be too much of a distraction . . .*

FRANK: That's called a good day! (Laughter.)

JIM: *Having taken on so much with RONIN, from writer to penciler, are there any points where you feel you need someone to talk to?*

FRANK: I suppose that's one of the reasons why I share work space with other artists. It's important to cross-pollinate, or even to just have someone impartial look at the stuff you've been sweating over. One of the reasons I'm glad to be working with **Dick Giordano** is that the discipline I'm newest at is inking, and I couldn't get better advice on the subject.

DAK: *You said you were very much into comics now. Do you look at the other books?*

FRANK: I'm very, very much into *doing* comics, Dave, but most of the comics I'm into aren't published over here. I've been looking at mostly the samurai stuff, and the work of **Moebius, Bilal** and all in Europe.

JIM: *I've always felt Walt's stuff is terrific, but I think it loses a lot when someone else inks it, no matter how good that inker is. With that other identity superimposed over it, something of the looseness is lost. I noticed with your RONIN that, although it doesn't look anything like Simonson's stuff, it has more of that quality of looseness that Walt's work has. Do you think that comes from working with him, unconsciously, or do you think it's because you're inking your own work?*

FRANK: I don't know. I don't think there's much that Walter and I have in common as artists. I'm bound to have learned some things from him, because he's been doing it for so much longer than I have, and he does it so well.

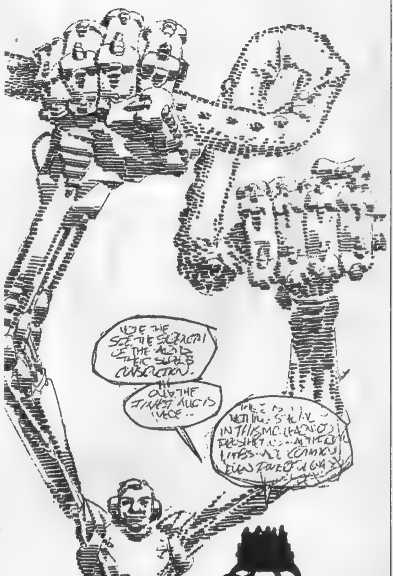
JIM: *It's mostly that looseness.*

FRANK: That may come from just working on the material and thinking of it as *drawing*, rather than just penciling and inking. I still pencil first and then ink it, but I'm thinking from the start what the finished thing is going to look like. Instead of applying technique to drawing. My favorite kinds of artists are those like **Nick Cardy** and **Joe Kubert**, who obviously think in ink.

DAK: *And have an incredibly loose flow!*

FRANK: Yeah. I got the idea of doing those free-hand borders from BATLASH.

Science fiction Miller-style, from RONIN #1.


HOPE THE SECRET OF THE ALIEN TECH SURVIVES CURIOUSLY.
ONLY THE STRONGEST ALIEN'S VOICE . .
WE'RE DOING SOMETHING IN THIS SPACE SHUTTLE . . . ANOTHER LIVES . . . NO COMMUNICATIONS . . .

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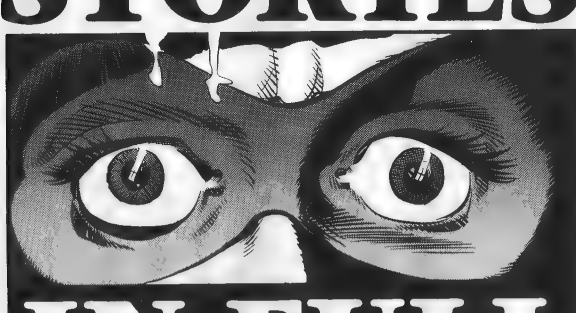

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"I'm working on becoming a cartoonist . . "

It's one of my favorite strips *ever*. Beautiful work.

DAK: *I still have all my BAT LASH issues safely preserved . . .*

FRANK: That's the kind of stuff I really get off on, much more than I do the super-slick stuff. What I get out of looking at pictures is emotion, movement, energy. I'm not really into pretty stuff.

DAK: *Did you design the RONIN logo?*

FRANK: Neal Posner came up with the idea for the logo. He showed it to me and I went apeshit. It's the first comics logo I've ever seen with blood on it. (Laughter.)

JIM: *The whole tone of RONIN, if I'm not mistaken, is very grim. When humor appears, it's very rare . . .*

FRANK: There is humor in RONIN. But it's generally pretty black. What's interesting is that, as I've been getting into this grim, scary series, I've found myself investigating *cartooning*. I'm not talking about big foot cartoons here, though. I'm talking about the political work of **Daumier**, the caricature, the distortion of reality that the great cartoonists, and the early comic book artists, were into.

It seems that as comic books have gotten more and more into adventure, emphasizing the hero versus villain conflict, they've lost a lot of what makes cartooning work — we've lost a lot of the texture and character that you find in old cartoons. Some of the old comics artists, like **Jack Kirby**, did terrific caricatures. That's an essential part of why his work, worked. Because of the particular atmosphere in RONIN, I'm finding the opportunity to get into the particular characters who are straight caricatures of people who I know and things that I see. Because it is a science fiction story, it's removed from this particular time — it's a little further away — I can take what's around me and interpret it as much as I want to. Really, I'm working on becoming a cartoonist in more senses of the word than it is now. I'm trying to make the stuff very textural, and very lively, so while the context is essentially pretty grim, I think that in many ways RONIN is going to be pretty . . . well . . . bouncy.

DAK: *Even though you don't want to give away the plot, is there science fiction in RONIN?*

FRANK: Yeah. It's there . . .

DAK: *. . . for all you curious people out there!*

JIM: *You mentioned JIMBO before —*

FRANK: That was YOJIMBO, the movie.

JIM: *I thought you meant the underground comic . . .*

FRANK: No, I wasn't talking about JIMBO, no. (Laughter.)

JIM: *Are you familiar with any of the underground stuff, like AMERICAN SPLENDOR?*

FRANK: I've only seen a little bit of that, and read a few issues of RAW. I've seen some reprints, and some in French that were just knockouts . . . by **Samayo . . .**

JIM: *Is that the guy who did the Manhattan story in RAW? I really liked that.*

Frank Miller in his corner studio at Upstart Associates.

Photo: Eliot Brown

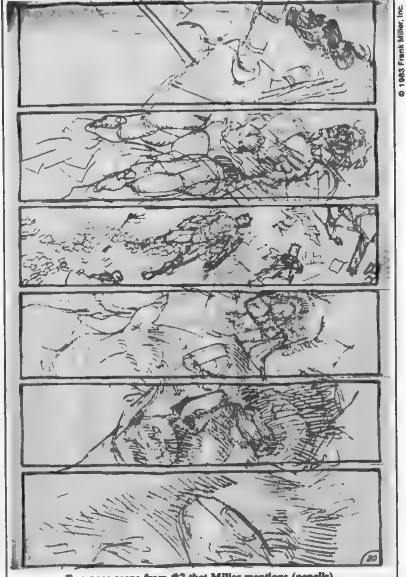
"I'm going to get it for RONIN . . .

FRANK: "Joe's Bar" is the name of it.
JIM: *For someone who's never been to New York City, that really captures the feeling. What have you been reading lately?*
FRANK: I enjoy **Stephen King**, and I just recently read TIME AND AGAIN by **Jack Finney**. But mostly, for the past year or two, Jim, it's been samurai books. Anything I could find written about or by samurai, I've devoured. I've become addicted to the research. Most of it never appears in the final product, it just affects my attitude toward the character. Especially since the actual samurai part of the RONIN adventure is only half of one issue. It was technically more research than I had to do, but it helped me put together my thoughts for the series. I'd say the research affected the writing much more than may be immediately obvious.

DAK: *It helped in getting your head in the right place?*
FRANK: Yeah. It gave me comparisons to make between past and present. That's important stuff. And plenty of detail on the samurai, which is essential.

DAK: *Even with comics, which in this country have relatively limited exposure compared to, say, television — it doesn't matter what you're writing about, there's always somebody out there —*
FRANK: Who'll catch you with that soup ladle that wasn't right in thirteenth-century Prussia, or whatever. It's awful. In fact, I'm going to get it for RONIN, because I stylized the hell out of the costumes. I wanted the book to look historical, yet I wanted it to be modern enough so that the reader could read it without saying, "Look at those neat costumes." I take lots of liberties with the facts, and as always I catch mistakes after things go to press. Little technical things. I know that from the number of times I got corrected about the way Elektra held her sai. (Laughter.)

DAK: *Well, there's some cosmic law that says no matter how hard you work on anything, the second it comes back printed, that's when all of your mistakes will glare out at you.*
FRANK: No kidding!
JIM: *Are you doing any other new projects?*
FRANK: No, no stories outside of RONIN for now. I got off to a particularly slow start after months of negotiation on the series, and I've still got lots of time to gain on the schedule.
DAK: *After the popularity of DAREDEVIL, you must have had lots of offers from people who were willing to publish Frank Miller . . .*
FRANK: Yeah. I haven't really felt insecure on that score, but this project has become an obsession. I work best when I'm completely involved. When I was just doing DAREDEVIL and nothing else for a stretch of months there, I produced some of the better issues. And with RONIN, it's going to take the same kind of toll on my time. I can't hop from project to project — doing RONIN is almost like going off and writing a novel.
JIM: *Would you like to write an actual novel?*
FRANK: I don't know. Right now, I want to do comics.
DAK: *I enjoyed your talking about how comics had evolved from political cartoons all the way to superhero comic-books. Speaking of antecedents, isn't it interesting that you're doing a comic-book novel, and it's being published the way Charles Dickens' material was first published. He did these big novels, but they, too, were serialized, and came out in installments.*
FRANK: I'd love to see the whole RONIN saga collected in one volume someday. That's what's so nice about what's happening now: There are different formats and different printing



Two-page scene from #2 that Miller mentions (pencils).

this project has become an obsession."

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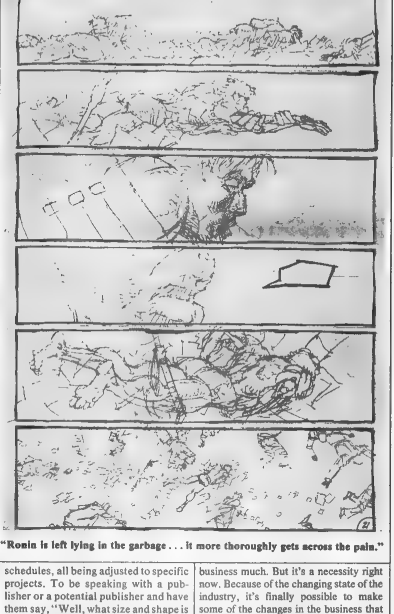

"Ronin is left lying in the garbage . . . it more thoroughly gets across the pain."

schedules, all being adjusted to specific projects. To be speaking with a publisher or a potential publisher and have them say, "Well, what size and shape is your project and how many pages will it run, and how many installments will there be?" That's a brand new phenomenon. It's completely different and it's going to change the face of the comics industry here in the U.S.

JIM: *Not only are you acting as editor, artist, and writer on RONIN — the whole creative side — but you're also taking care of the business side, too. How do you handle all that?*

FRANK: Not as well as I should. I've lost a lot of work time. I don't like doing business much. But it's a necessity right now. Because of the changing state of the industry, it's finally possible to make some of the changes in the business that should have been made a long time ago. And just enough of the people who have enough power — people with enough clout in the marketplace and who are therefore valuable enough to the client — are making changes happen that will benefit not only the talent in comics, but the companies as well, since comics will improve and sell more. Everybody is going to win, if things go the way they should — if the companies can learn to give up enough to make it worth our while, and if the freelancers can learn to value their own work enough to demand rights that are theirs the moment they do the work.

Unfortunately, there's still sizable resistance — even among writers and artists. We've all been treated like children for so long that it feels to some like they're attacking mommy when they say "No, this is mine" about copyright, or whatever. Keep in mind that the work-made-for-hire provision in the copyright law declares the client the *author* of the work, and you'll see how the pride that should be attached to creative work has been kept in check.

Fortunately, what changes *have* been made have so radically improved the freelancer's life — or at least made it possible to improve it — that even the most stuck-in-the-mud good soldiers are starting to get a better sense of their own value.

All of which doesn't change the fact that doing business is tiring, tedious, and frustrating. And I don't get paid for it. But neither does **Starlin** or **Englehart** or **Gerber.** What it constitutes is an investment of energy in my future and the quality of my life. So, in a way, I guess it does pay — eventually.

DAK: *And, important as it is in causing the format of comics to change, it's unseen by the readers.*

FRANK: Absolutely. It has to be. I don't ever want to become a public personality. The characters that I create — like RONIN — may be popular or hated or whatever. But I don't want to be in front of the work. It's a very bad thing for people who do comics to start appearing in public too often and start becoming stage acts in and of themselves. I think you can see what happens to people who hop from con to con, seeking applause. They either stop producing altogether or start eating their own tails, creatively. They follow an audience that doesn't know what it wants, trying to second guess fans who should be following them. I'm afraid of comics becoming as inbred and clubby as science fiction is, where authors read their books out loud before they're published, where the difference between artist and audience is faded, and where the product is uniformly predictable and unimaginative. Good work is not produced by a democracy, or a committee. It's produced by someone who does what satisfies himself, without living on reviews and applause. In comics, we aren't singers or dancers, so our physical appearance isn't part of what we sell. We, ourselves, are not the product. The only thing we should be selling is the story.

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"I've heard people say NEW GODS was great because (I) wrote it. That's not true."

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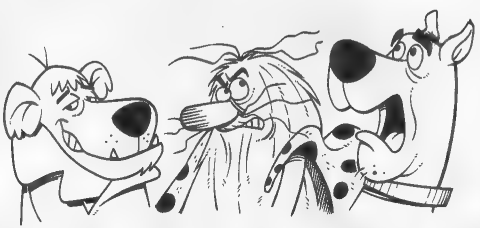

MARK EVANIER

At a DC-sponsored New York City convention of West Coast comics creators, writer/editor Mark Evanier didn't mind being shanghied from Marv Wolfman's office into the convenient DC Comics conference room for an informal inquisition. Sitting in on the session were Roger Slifer and D. Jon Zimmerman . . .

DAK: *Gerry Conway says I should ask you for secrets behind the comics, that you have lots of stories.*

MARK EVANIER: I know everything about everybody.

DAK: *That's all he said. I don't know who to ask you about. You worked with Kirby for a number of years, when he was at DC, didn't you?*

MARK: I was **Jack Kirby's** assistant for a year or two. Actually, more than that — about three years, I guess.

DAK: *Mark, how did you meet Jack and become his assistant?*

MARK: I was the president of a comic-book club that existed in Los Angeles from around 1966-1969. Every Saturday about forty people would get together to trade comics and talk about the industry. The vice-president, the secretary, the treasurer and I went to visit Jack, who had just moved to Irvine, which is a town about fifteen miles south of L.A. At that time, a comic-book artist in Los Angeles was a rarity. Now, there are tons. But back then if you lived in L.A. you couldn't work for DC or Marvel, **Alex Toth** being about the only exception. So when we heard that Jack had moved to California, we all went bananas. I met him then as a fan of his work. The following day, I went to work for Marvelmania International, which was a mail-order firm that had obtained the rights to sell Marvel posters, decals and merchandise by mail. The man who ran it was a crook.

DAK: *That explains why I never got my issues.*

MARK: He stiffed me for a few thousand bucks and almost everyone who ordered from him got taken, too. He vanished into the night, literally. I've written up the story for posterity and will publish it someday. He was a very smooth salesman and he had an amazing modus operandi. He had declared bankruptcy once and since you can't declare again for seven years, he would just start businesses up and then run them into the ground. He would pay his bills for about a year, hoping to become a millionaire. If it didn't work, though (and it never did), he would

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Mark Evanier

Occupation: Writer and story editor.

Residence: Los Angeles, California. Born and raised there, and spent all my life there.

Credits: Walt Disney comics, Warner Brothers comics, Hanna-Barbera comics, Edgar Rice Burroughs comics. For TV: WELCOME BACK, KOTTER; LOVE BOAT, THUNDARR, SCOOBY-DOO, RICHIE RICH, GOLDIE GOLD and, currently, THAT'S INCREDIBLE.

Training: Very little. I went to U.C.L.A. I started writing professionally in 1969, right out of high school, and haven't been out of work since. I took Literature at U.C.L.A. and it was of absolutely no help whatsoever, so I quit. I've spent every day since then writing all sorts of weird things.

Self-Image: I put silly things on paper and people give me money

"I'm going to DC," Jack Kirby said.

strip the business, vanish into the night, change his name and set up shop someplace else. I quit Marvelmania about a year before he pulled his disappearing act there, when I finally began to realize the extent of the man's duplicity. **Steve Sherman,** who was working with me, and I phoned everyone we knew who was working for him and warned them. We even phoned **Stan Lee.** Sure enough, a year later, the people who worked for him came to work one morning and the furniture and their personal belongings were gone. A day later, he had been scheduled to appear in court, because a creditor from four years before had tracked him down and subpoenaed him — so he vanished again. To this day, if you go into almost any printer in the Los Angeles area and describe him, they'll know him. He stiffed them all.

D. JON ZIMMERMAN: *I take it he's never been found?*

MARK: Never been found. I know of at least two private detectives who were hired to find him. His mother had been with a collection agency and so he knew every trick in the world to avoid capture. He didn't have a driver's license, he wasn't registered to vote, things like that. Once he was caught, he knew how to avoid arrest. One time, he told bill collectors that his mother had just died, and a year later she walked into the office, but he had meanwhile buried her about thirty times in sob stories. It always worked to buy another two weeks on his bills.

Anyway, **Jack Kirby** was doing a lot of merchandising art for Marvelmania and one day **Kirby** took me out to lunch and told me this big secret —"I'm going to DC.

Nobody knows it yet, "he said, **"Stan Lee** will find out tomorrow." He asked me to be his assistant and he hired **Steve Sherman,** too. I had been writing for local magazines and wanted to write for comics, but living in L.A., it was impossible. At that time, **Russ Manning** couldn't even work for DC — they told him he'd have to move to New York. They didn't feel they could trust anyone three thousand miles away. Three years later, they were sending work to the Philippines, but that particular year it was impossible to work for Marvel or DC from so far away, and so I leapt at the chance to work with Jack, who I'd always admired. For three years, I spent one or two days a week helping him with letter columns, being a sounding board, giving a few ideas, writing a few pages here and there, drawing backgrounds, etc.

I started with Jack the day he left Marvel and stayed with him until KA-

NEW GODS #10 by Jack Kirby.

MANDI #1. I left at that point. Jack had come to DC almost under a false impression. He was supposed to do books that would have required editorial material and for which he would have needed an assistant. Those plans did not materialize and he ended up drawing X number of pages; I think he did fifteen a week. So he kept me around until it became obvious that they were not going to do some of the books that Jack wanted to do. Jack wanted to start a book and then turn it over to other people. He wanted to supervise books and throw creative ideas into other people's books. He wanted to be more like — and this is a rotten analogy — like a honeybee pollinating other books. That's what he did at Marvel, unintentionally, for so many years. He would have needed an assistant, had that materialized. This has never been mentioned anywhere, but we were going to turn MR. MIRACLE over to **Steve Ditko** after a couple of issues and have me write it and **Ditko** draw it. **Carmine Infantino,** publisher of DC at the time, vetoed that and said **Kirby** had to do it all himself.

ROGER SLIFER: *Was any of that taken into account — that Ditko might be drawing the character, when Mr. Miracle was created and designed?*

MARK: Not really. Ditko was not necessarily definite. He was only our first choice and I think we talked briefly to him about it. Folks forget but the NEW GODS saga was intended to be a limited series that would run eighteen or so issues and then end. There was no intention that these characters would go on forever. However, after Jack's books started getting good sales figures, DC demanded that we keep them going and use guest stars like Deadman, which we were very much against doing. So **Kirby** had this novel he was forever stuck in the middle of — he could never get to the last chapter. The thrust of the book changed and other characters were brought in. You can spot the issues where Jack kind of gave up trying to advance the story of Darkseid and Orion and was marking time. If those books had been intended from the start to run indefinitely, they would have been done very differently.

DAK: *That's very interesting, Mark. Not knowing that, I had always assumed that Jack was very good at coming up with concepts and starting things, but that he was unable to focus.*

MARK: Another thing with those books, is that Carmine was encouraging Jack to put as many characters as possible into them. Jack and Carmine as artists are almost exact opposites. **Carmine Infantino** is the only artist whose work I ever heard **Jack Kirby** say he didn't like — not because he wasn't talented, but because he didn't like that kind of artwork. And *vise versa.* And Carmine grudgingly conceded that Jack's artwork was selling his comic books on the newsstands. Just getting Jack away from Marvel gave DC an advantage.

When Jack worked for DC in the '50s, I understand he was constantly being shown **Curt Swan** pages, and told by **Sol Harrison** "Why can't you draw like this?" (General laughter.) When I first visited DC as Jack's assistant, several long-time DC staff members went out of their way to tell me they thought **Jack Kirby** couldn't draw. There's a very famous incident in the history of DC, where the publisher preceding Carmine was having a conference and pointed to the Marvel books that were clobbering theirs, and concluded that the secret of Marvel's success was bad art. (More laughter.) They actually ordered a few of their artists to start doing cruder work. For example, Ross Andru — who was doing WONDER WOMAN — had to start emulating the old **Harry G. Peters** style. DC couldn't see the quality in most of Marvel's art. They had, for many years, a policy regarding a company look — it was the machine, not the man.

I got to see a history of MGM which was commissioned internally and never published because it was too derogatory to the company's founders. Remember that this was a movie studio that was once in a position analagous to DC's in comics.

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"Stan Lee will find out tomorrow."

There was a time when it was inconceivable that MGM could ever be anything other than the biggest movie-maker in the world. Now, they're in the hotel business, but then they believed that a movie sold not because of the actors or writer, but because of MGM casting, production, concepts, technical facilities, that it sold because it was an MGM film. DC for many years, being in roughly comparable position, what with "owning" all the big stars in its field, believed that a DC comic was better than a Marvel book, even if both were drawn by the same people — because it was produced by DC, it was better. Someone who wanted to draw SUPERMAN would be handed a **Curt Swan** story and told that this was the ultimate look. **Jack Kirby** was constantly being pushed into that narrow area. When Carmine got the chance to hire Jack away, he felt that he would be striking a morale blow, if nothing else, against Marvel — and also that a lot of Marvel fans would follow Jack over and discover how great the DC books were, and start buying LOIS LANE. (Laughter.) At that time, Carmine still had an unshakable faith in the DC product.

Z: *That would explain why DC changed Kirby's Superman faces. You could see where they were re-drawn.*

MARK: They never told Jack about that. He read about it in a fanzine. The merchandising of Superman was very important at that time. They not only changed Jack's, but **Mike Sekowsky** was drawing SUPERGIRL at the time and they changed *his* Superman when the character appeared in that book. And his Superman had been good enough to appear in forty issues of JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA for years — yet suddenly, they had to have **Murphy Anderson** redraw it.

DAK: *About adding characters to the series, Carmine certainly had a wont to do that . . .*

MARK: We were ordered to put Deadman into NEW GODS, but we slipped him into FOREVER PEOPLE, instead, where he was a little less obtrusive. Jack didn't like the character and didn't want to do it. He didn't feel he should be doing someone else's character. He's very sensitive about that. He doesn't want to trample on someone else's vision. Carmine said the character hadn't sold and he wanted the **Kirby** touch on it. Carmine loved Deadman but it wasn't commercially successful. He thought Jack might make a minor change and make it work. Jack could never create a dead character. It's so unlike him. The whole concept of NEW GODS and the anti-life equation was to get away from the death obsession he found at DC. He was pushing for a pro-life concept. That's when DC had this death fetish on covers.

DAK: *There are rumors Jack Kirby wasn't writing his own stuff — that you and Steve Sherman were . . .*

MARK: No. Jack has been under fire a lot by people who are jealous of him or resent him. Several times I've heard people who were deriding his writing, say — when challenged with the statement that the NEW GODS stuff was great — that's because **Mark Evanier** wrote it. But that's not true. There were two or three issues of JIMMY OLSEN I wrote about half of, but I don't think with THE NEW GODS stuff that I contributed more than ten percent to any other book, storywise. And it was generally in plots, not dialogue.

DAK: *I thought he made it up as he went along . . .*

MARK: He does. For instance, in MR. MIRACLE #5, I plotted everything that did not involve the Funky Flashman character — all the stuff that involved the female assassin troop I plotted, including naming a couple of the characters, while Jack did the main sequence. It was all plotting. All the dialogue in that issue was his — every word of it. In this case, Jack said to me he had an idea and I gave him story sequences and he would fit them in. Everything finally went through him. Like, in the JIMMY OLSEN books, I did most of the Newsboy Legion sequences. I would give him a rough panel-by-panel breakdown of action and he would completely re-draw it and re-pace it. Some of the concepts were mine, or things we worked out in conference. Jack did ninety-nine percent of it. There's one issue of FOREVER PEOPLE that has my name on it as having contributed to the writing, and I had absolutely nothing to do with it, but Jack had left my name off another issue that I *did* deserve credit on, so he made it up that way.

DAK: *It's fascinating to hear how Jack works. He's had such an enormous impact on comics. We all hear about how*

Visage of villainy: the dread Darkseid, from FOREVER PEOPLE #3.

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"We were ordered to put Deadman in NEW GODS."

Stan and Jack worked together, but this is like being there.

MARK: I had lunch with **Stan Lee** a couple weeks ago and we spent hours talking about that. Jack kept tons of Stan's old plot outlines, so I have a pretty good picture of how they worked together. I have some of Stan's old plots and notes.

DAK: *I have a copy of the plot for FANTASTIC FOUR # 1.*

MARK: That's great. I have AVENGERS # 4.

DAK: *It turned up in the office when* **Roger Stern** *was cleaning and I xeroxed it. The outline, the bare bones of the story is there. It seems to indicate — whether or not it was done after a conference with Jack — that Stan did actually give him a plot.*

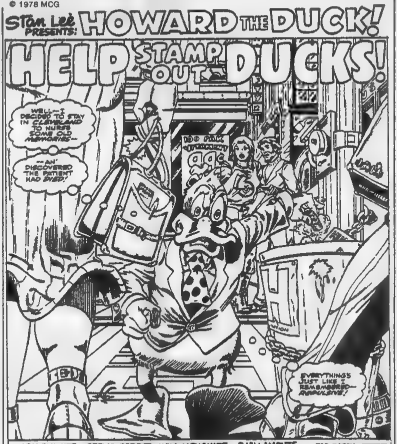
MARK: Stan told me something interesting. There was one point in the SPIDERMAN books when the credits changed from "Art by **Steve Ditko**" to "plotted and drawn by **Steve Ditko.**" At that point, **Ditko** had demanded to receive more than just artist pay and credit. The credits changed, but their method of working didn't change substantially. Stan said that simultaneously he offered the same thing to **Kirby** — to give him a co-writing credit — and Jack, instead, asked that the credits read "Produced by **Stan Lee** and **Jack Kirby**" or some variation of that. If you look at the credits, very rarely after that did it say "Written by **Stan Lee.**" Jack asked to keep it ambiguous and Stan went along with it.

DAK: *Jack said in an interview in COMICS SCENE that he wrote those books. But his concept of writing, it seems to me, is that he did the plotting. He obviously didn't do the dialogue.*

MARK: There's a discrepancy over the use of the term "writing." There's a book called THE CRAFT OF THE SCREENWRITER by **John Brady.** In it there's an interview with **William Goldman,** one of my favorites. He was asked how he felt about actors ad-libbing, such as **Dustin Hoffman** and **Robert Redford** did in ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN. He said he wasn't thrilled about it, but it wasn't that important, because the most important thing a writer contributes is the structure. When Jack talks about having written all those books, he's saying in the same way that he decided the structure and context.

DAK: *So Jack's definition of a writer is different?*

MARK: I was talking with **Marv Wolfman** and he had some penciled pages and he said he had to go write them. It's an imprecision of language that annoys me. He's not going to actually write them, because to me that involves the plotting and the dialogue. He's going to dialogue the pages. There are some writers, and I use the term in quotes, who think that dialogue is all that writing is. It's both.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STAN LEE PRESENTS: HOWARD THE DUCK!
HELP! STAMP OUT DUCKS!
MARK EVANIER STEVE GERBER WILL MEUGNIOT P. VILLAMONTE JOE ROSEN LETTERER
EDITOR WRITER ARTIST INKER MICHELE WOLKOWITZ COLORIST

Splash page from HOWARD THE DUCK #29, with plot by Evanier and art by Meugniot, the DNAgent team.

DAK: *I've noticed since his last stint at DC, Kirby rarely works with anyone who dialogues . . .*

MARK: When Jack came to DC, almost every writer in the business came to him directly or indirectly and said, "I want to be your writer." No one said, "I'll be your dialogue writer and take half the credit."

No one assumed that Stan made a contribution, which is untrue. Stan definitely made a contribution. A lot of people who were trying to impress Jack thought that's what he wanted to hear. Jack decided he would either work from a full script — where the writer did *all* the writing and Jack just did the drawing — or he would do the writing, himself. He's made a few exceptions. But basically he has come to not believe, I think, in the Marvel method of writing a comic as something which works either creatively or morally for him.

Jack is the type of person, who even if you gave him a very tight plot, wouldn't follow it — and most people wouldn't want him to. Given the choice of having Jack just as an artist, or having Jack come up with new characters, they all prefer the latter, because DC and Marvel don't think most of the people they have on staff *can* do that. He has been given the opportunity to start more new books than any five other people put together in the last few years.

I can't think of anyone else who could walk into DC Comics and be told that he could have any character he wanted or create any books he wanted. Literally, that's what happened. He was told he could take any book he wanted. If he wanted to do BATMAN, they'd bump whoever was working on it. If he wanted to do FLASH, they'd fire whoever was doing it at the time. He took JIMMY OLSEN, because that was the only book

"DC and Marvel should be embarrassed

John Davidson, Mark Evanier and Cathy Lee Crosby humming it up on the set of THAT'S INCREDIBLE.

at the time that didn't have a regular writer and artist, and he didn't want to be responsible for firing anybody. He is the kindest, sweetest man in the world.

Some of the people who haven't gotten him to do what they want have attributed a certain arrogance to him. They said he was difficult and demanding. Yet, two or three times, I have forced Jack to replace an inker who was despoiling his pencils by nagging him to death — he could never bring himself to hurt someone's income.

DAK: *He's now doing storyboarding?*

MARK: Besides doing his books for Pacific Comics, he's working for Ruby-Spears and Hanna-Barbera — doing character concepts and designs. He did some storyboarding for Marvel, which was not successful, because Jack doesn't understand animation. When they did THE FANTASTIC FOUR cartoon show, **Stan Lee** got Jack in, and they tried to do storyboards in the Marvel method, where Jack would plot and draw it and Stan would put the dialogue in, but it didn't work. From a technical standpoint, it's impossible to do a Saturday morning cartoon that way. That's the only time Jack's done storyboards. Mostly, he does presentation art — designing characters and backgrounds. On the THUNDARR show, they would just pay him to sit down and sketch villains and monsters and creatures and machines — then write stories around them or incorporate them somehow. In other words, they paid him to set the style. He also does a lot of development work for animated shows that don't come to pass, which is how the industry works.

DAK: *What else have you done behind the scenes in comics?*

MARK: For years, I wrote the Disney comics, Warner Brothers comics, Hanna-Barbera comics . . . all sorts of funny-books. I've written a lot of comics that were never published in this country. For a year I wrote and edited for the **Edgar Rice Burroughs** comic-book department. We did hundreds of pages of material for around the world that was never pub-

about properties they've allowed to atrophy."

lished in America. I did a whole series of comics for the **San Rio Film Company** in Japan that I packaged, edited, wrote and hired all my friends to draw.

DAK: *What sorts of things did you do when you were packaging TARZAN material for overseas?*

MARK: While Gold Key was producing the TARZAN and KORAK comics, the Edgar Rice Burroughs, Inc. people were making acres of money, selling the reprint rights overseas. They got $40.00 a page from Brazil and $80.00 a page from France and $60.00 a page from Spain and so on. This is completely found money, because there was no investment on their part. DC got the rights to do the ERB books, because Gold Key refused to expand the number of ERB books being published. DC was willing to do so — if they sold well. ERB, Inc. figured they'd get more pages to sell overseas, but the DC books sold only about one-third what the Gold Key books had sold. And the foreign publishers didn't like the **Joe Kubert** stuff at all . . .

DAK: *That's incredible.*

MARK: There are several reasons for that. The **Russ Manning** TARZAN was considered "definitive" overseas. Most of the foreign editions were publishing two issues per month. The **Joe Kubert** material was coming in, one issue per month, so they continued to print the **Russ Manning** material, some of which was in its eighteenth printing. Not only was **Kubert** doing a very different TARZAN, which was alternating with the Manning version, but he was sometimes adapting the same books. They didn't match in any way, shape or form. DC also altered KORAK. **Joe Kubert** felt it was an intrusion on the Tarzan legend, and they published it reluctantly, despite the fact that Korak was more popular than Tarzan in every single foreign country. There were not enough new pages being produced, nor were they pleasing foreign publishers, and so the gentleman who was the president of ERB, Inc. at that time hired **Russ Manning** and myself to edit pages strictly to be sold to the overseas market. Russ edited TARZAN in his style and I edited KORAK, which **Dan Spiegle** drew. After two months, I took over TARZAN, too, because Russ had a falling out with them.

DAK: *What do you mean when you say he edited the pages?*

MARK: He produced fifteen pages of TARZAN and I produced fifteen of KORAK a week. He was responsible for producing fifteen pages a week in his style, some of which he drew and in other cases re-drew and re-touched work by artists he hired. He was using **Rick Hoberg** and **Mike Royer** and **Dave Stevens.** These were the first professional jobs for **Hoberg** and **Stevens.** He used **Pete Hoffman, Danny Bulanadi.** I inherited a lot of his people, when I took over the TARZAN stuff, too. I used **Pat Boyette, Doug Wildey, Will Meugniot, Alex Nino, Mike Ploog, Alan Weiss, Bill Wray.**

DAK: How come they've never been printed here?

MARK: Because ERB, Inc isn't interested in that. They make so much money selling reprint rights, they want American publishers to produce new material to sell overseas. Everytime DC or Marvel or even Western would draw a page of TARZAN, ERB, Inc. could make a few hundred bucks on it, overseas. However, at one point when the ERB contract was coming to a close, **Bob Hodes**, who was then president of ERB, Inc. felt that they should get into doing their own publishing venture. I worked out a plan to start an **Edgar Rice Burroughs** comic-book publishing company, which could take half of what we were producing for over there — the best stuff — and make it into American editions. We worked out the economics and then Hodes was fired, and the rights were sold to Marvel, instead.

DAK: *So now the Edgar Rice Burroughs people aren't doing anything new?*

MARK: There's a place in Spain producing pages for most of the overseas publishers, in the **Manning** and **Spiegle** styles — imitating, of course. That's why the whole Marvel deal was doomed from the start. I predicted exactly what would happen. One of the ERB people found a letter in the file that I had written regarding that — one of the great I-told-you-so letters of history. I even predicted exactly how many issues **John Buscema** would last! The foreign publishers did not want adaptations. **Roy Thomas** felt they should do adaptations. They wanted the **Russ Manning** versions, but **John Buscema** wanted to make it as much like the **Joe Kubert** version as possible. Also, the foreign publishers needed stories in fifteen-page increments, because most of the books feature thirty pages of material and two pages of ads. Everything that made the books commercial in America, made them uncommercial overseas. And *vice-versa.*

Art by Meugnlot and Spiegle for European ERB comics story, "Bowmen of New Lothar."

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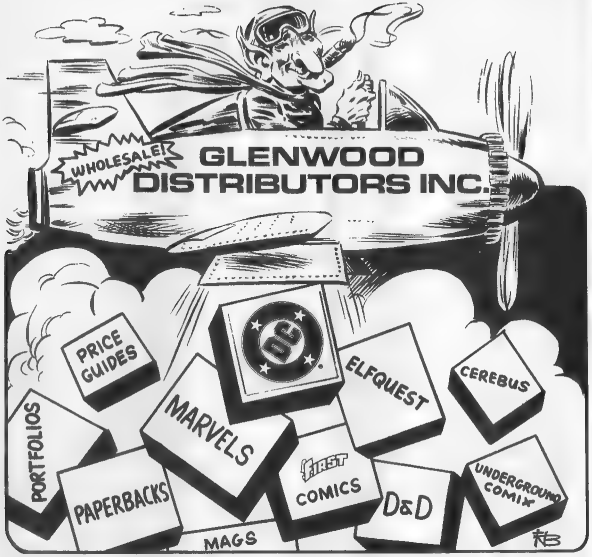

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"I became the Tarzan authority at ERB, Inc."

DAK: *I was sorry it didn't work out, because Tarzan is one of my all-time favorite characters. I've read each of the original novels six or seven times.*

MARK: I became the Tarzan authority at ERB, Inc. and never read any of the books! I bluffed my way through. I liked the characters but the books didn't really appeal to me. You did a couple issues of TARZAN . . .

DAK: *When Gerry Conway was an editor here at DC, I dialogued one issue of an adaptation of TARZAN THE UNTAMED. At Marvel, I started the first original story that had been done in TARZAN in a long time — then moved to Georgia and went off the series before I could finish it. The story as concluded was totally different than what I had in mind . . .*

MARK: You see, Dave, neither DC nor Marvel are really geared to doing other people's properties, because they want to promote and merchandise their own characters outside of comics — and they can't do that with a licensed property. When Marvel did STAR WARS, they did it to enhance the line. DC grabbed TARZAN for two reasons. ERB, Inc. was toying with the idea of starting their own comic-book company and Carmine knew it was a valuable enough property that it might launch a competing comic-book line. Also, the name TARZAN carried enormous weight with distributors. It meant a lot to say, "we have Superman, Batman — and Tarzan." DC's line probably improved five to ten percent in distribution.

DAK: *Even though the title, itself, didn't sell?*

MARK: It was a very hot property. It was a prestige item, but after a year, it'd diminished. And they were embarrassed that it had sold 80% at Gold Key and only something like 23% at DC. It's like all the properties that Marvel grabs on to, promotes the hell out of for a month or two, and then gives the "Marvel touch" and cancels them. Both DC and Marvel should be embarrassed about the fantastic properties they're allowed to atrophy because they were more interested in pushing their own characters. They were not interested in publishing the characters they bought the rights to, but in keeping them off the stands — purely a proprietary interest. Marvel was never interested in publishing the Hanna-Barbera comics. They knew the properties were available, and if they didn't publish them, somebody else would.

DAK: *Did you package those?*

MARK: I wrote almost all of them and I edited about half of them. **Chase Craig** did the other half. He came out of retirement for this. He'd worked for Western Publishing for twenty-five years. He and I spent about two years packaging foreign Hanna-Barbera comics, too.

Edgar Rice Burroughs'
KORAK
SON OF TARZAN
© 1965 ERB, Inc.
RIGHT AND WRONG... TWO WORDS IN ALL. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THEM IS THE SOUL OF HUMAN EXISTENCE. HARVEY HAWKINS WAS ONE MAN CAUGHT UNAWARES BETWEEN THOSE WORDS. UNSURE WHERE TO TURN, HARVEY LOOKED TO THE STARS AND THERE HE FOUND...
THE MAN IN THE MOON
WRITTEN BY MARK EVANIER
ILLUSTRATED BY DOUG WILDEY

Rare chance to see foreign KORAK art.

DAK: *The Marvel ones didn't do well on the stands?*

MARK: We were told very conflicting things. Initially, we were told they were selling well, then badly. The royalty statements were good, so it's difficult to say. Basically, Marvel was not interested in publishing those books. Some of the people in the office at the time were very resentful of them. One of the dumbest mistakes ever to happen in the history of publishing was made on an issue of SCOOBY-DOO. Marvel is notorious for printing pages out of order. It happens frequently. But this time they switched page twenty-two with page one! Someone actually extended the art on the splash page — the first page is normally an inch and a half shorter to leave room for the indicia. Then they took page twenty-two and cut an inch and a half off the artwork, and put the page at the beginning of the book! Plus, they had to renumber the pages which we'd numbered correctly. Someone had to sit there for four hours to re-paste these pages together wrong. Several people I know think it was deliberate sabotage. I don't know why anyone would do that but I also can't conceive of anyone being stupid enough to do that accidentally. But that's how much they cared about that book.

"Most of the people who should be

BY YIMMINY! MENDRICKSON'S THE BEST MAN THERE BE!
I DON'T LIKE THE IDEA OF READING A MAN'S PRIVATE MAIL, ESPECIALLY TO HIS WIFE.
GO AHEAD. IT'S FOR HIS OWN GOOD.
© 1982 DC Comics, Inc.

The world of BLACKHAWK according to Mark Evanier (from #253).

DAK: *DENNIS THE MENACE didn't last very long either.*

MARK: Nothing they do like that does. Whether they do it consciously or not, I can't say. When you buy a property like that, you buy it to keep it out of the hands of somebody else. When **Martin Goodman** started his Atlas line a few years ago, he had all unknown quantities. If he had come out with STAR TREK, TARZAN, YOGI BEAR and DENNIS THE MENACE comics, he would have automatically been on equal footing with the majors. Those characters are as well known as SUPERMAN, BATMAN and THE FLASH and they all sold very well when anyone but Marvel or DC published them.

No one believes this, but it's true: ABC has Monday Night Football. The money they pay out for that is more than they could possibly take in. They lose money on every NFL game they broadcast. They do it for the prestige and ratings, and because surveys show that if some company like Metromedia got Monday Night Football — that would be the keystone they'd need to launch a fourth network as big as CBS, NBC or ABC. There's been an understanding between the networks that they will keep the World Series, the Academy Awards and such off the market, so that no company can use them as a cornerstone to start a fourth network. They'll take a multi-million dollar loss just so Metromedia, **Ted Turner** or somebody doesn't get it. Can you imagine how many Home Box Office subscriptions would be sold if HBO had the World Series? I think there's something comparable in comics. I think DC and Marvel are scared of some other company getting that keystone.

Z: *You really think, considering the quality of the product that the two major companies have, that they're worried about competition from Pacific, Aardvark-Vanaheim and the others?*

MARK: Yes. I think DC and Marvel are very scared of those companies. It's obvious. The royalty plans that were recently announced were not from the goodness of anyone's heart. They felt if they didn't do this, they would lose key people. I saw people from DC and Marvel studying the Pacific Comics contract very carefully. For many years in comics, a lot of people felt imprisoned. If they couldn't work for DC or Marvel, they'd have to sell shoes for a living. It allowed for some very unscrupulous business dealings on the part of the majors. It also caused some writers and artists to do some very dumb things out of paranoia of having their income cut out. I can write other things besides comics — but a guy who inks comics cannot go out and, say, ink paintings. Back in the '50s there was honest-to-God price-fixing between the companies. The editor of Company A would call the editor of Company B and tell him that Charlie Penciler was coming over to try and get more money. They'd make a deal. If one wouldn't raise his rate, the other wouldn't steal an inker, or whatever. There was actually collusion. A lot of old timers remembered that and were always afraid to negotiate — until these new companies came along.

Z: *In that case, it must have shaken a lot of people, when Jack Kirby made the break from Marvel to DC under those circumstances . . .*

MARK: Jack wanted to go to DC earlier, but couldn't because he had a long fight with **Jack Schiff**, who was editor at DC. **Schiff** retired, and a couple months later **Kirby** came over. They had a longstanding feud and **Schiff** had vowed that **Kirby** would never work for DC, and he didn't as long as **Schiff** was here. Jack, I think, thought at the time that if he didn't work for Marvel, he wouldn't be able to maintain his standard of living, because, obviously, Charlton was not prepared to meet his salary. He was very well paid at Marvel. Jack's always been one of — if not *the* — highest paid comic-book artist in the business. But he has still never made the kind of money he deserves.

DAK: *Do you still read comics?*

MARK: I get every comic book published. I have a voluminous collection crowding up my house. **Roger Slifer** will attest to that.

ROGER: That's true.

MARK: I feel like I have to keep the collection up, as an archivist. There's no one else I know in Los Angeles who has a collection like mine. Someone has to do it, because friends are always saying they have to borrow a METAL MEN or an EC, or whatever.

DAK: *But do you actually read the current ones?*

MARK: I used to read everything, but it's gotten to the point now where I skim everything. I look for anything unusual, then I read the few books I (a) know I like or (b) know the people who do them and might be asked to offer some criticism of. I read all of **Marv Wolfman**'s books and **Len Wein**'s books, because if I don't these people come to hurt me once a year when they come out for the San Diego convention.

DAK: *What do you think of the state of comics today?*

MARK: I think you can best describe the state by saying there are no more non-professional fanzines really, because most

publishing fanzines are working for Marvel."

of the people who should be publishing fanzines are working for Marvel Comics. (Laughter.) I think what has happened, and it sounds very arrogant to say, is — I believe in giving new people a chance, but I don't believe in giving them SPIDER-MAN. Len and Marv broke into comics about the same time I did. They were working for the more "mainstream" books. I was out there writing DAFFY DUCK and they were back here in New York doing six-page mystery stories. I suspect they've both grown kind of disgruntled over what's happened to comics. The analogy is someone who goes through medical school and spends twelve years learning how to be a surgeon. He gets his diploma and license to practice, then discovers they're letting anyone who can handle a knife do surgery. I think they're both kind of annoyed. If you talk to them, you'll hear this between the lines, if not outright, that the achievement they made by sweating and working hard to become professional writers, to aspire to someday write SPIDER-MAN or BATMAN, is demeaned by the fact that people are now coming in, and instead of starting the way **Dave Cockrum** did, doing backgrounds for someone else, they are now starting on key books. There's a tendency to replace seasoned veterans with someone unseasoned and new. It's kind of depressing. Too many of these people seem like they've never read anything *but* comics. They have an interesting way of combining a **Johnny Romita** style with a **Jack Kirby** style and a **Neal Adams** shading. But they do not bring to the field anything other than derivative comics. Too much time is spent explaining inconsistencies of comics twenty years ago that no one cares about anymore.

DAK: *But that doesn't make you completely in favor of destroying all the major and supporting characters in, say, THOR and starting over fresh?*

MARK: No. I think there's a great disrespect for what's gone on before. You have both these things going on. I have a strange theory to which most people in the field don't subscribe: The person who starts a comic book always has a certain proprietary interest in it, which other writers and artists should respect, even if the company doesn't. Several times, since **Steve Gerber** had his duck amputated, Marvel offered me jobs writing HOWARD THE DUCK in various formats . . . and I always refused. Howard is Steve's character and, to me, always will be. And you wouldn't believe how shocked Marvel is when someone turns work down on that basis. They simply don't expect that of someone who writes comics.

Many times when a comic sells, it's not because, but in spite, of what the current creative team does. I think FANTASTIC FOUR for years has been selling more because of what **Stan Lee** and **Jack Kirby** did, than because of what anybody writing or drawing the comic this month was doing. It's selling on the impetus, the revival of old villains, the character

A DAY LIKE NONE OTHER ON AMZOT, FOR EANDOR, IT BEGAN WITH THE SIGHTING OF SMOKE...
...FROM THE EASTERN JUNGLES! IS IT FIRE OR, WORSE. YET, ANOTHER ASSAULT FROM THOSE WHO WOULD COLONIZE OUR HOME WORLD?
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The Herculoids as drawn by Dave Stevens and edited by Evanier for Hanna-Barbera's TV STARS #3.

"Writers and artists should respect the creators."

designs, the concepts. There are an awful lot of comics that **Jack Kirby** has sold that he didn't draw. During certain years, the SUPERMAN books sold, not because of the people who were writing or drawing them, but because of what **Jerry Siegel** and **Joe Shuster** and maybe even **Mort Weisinger** had started. Nowadays, there's a tendency for someone to come in in, especially an ex-comic fan, and say that they're handling a comic and feel that they have just as much right to do what ever they want with it as the person who started it. I don't believe that's ever the case. Whether a writer or artist owns the book legally, and most of them don't, other writers and artists should respect the creators' status. When Warren was publishing THE SPIRIT — if somehow **Will Eisner** had not read the fine print in his contract and Warren wound up owning THE SPIRIT — a lot of comic-fans-turned-pro wouldn't hesitate to run in and say they'd want to write it, draw it and change it — and, because it was legal, it would be morally correct for them from both an ethical and creative standpoint, but it wouldn't be. Big sentence.

DAK: *What have you done outside comics, Mark?*

MARK: The television credits that people would be aware of are: I wrote WELCOME BACK, KOTTER for a year, some of the early LOVE BOATS, THE PINK LADY show, a lot of variety specials for NBC and CBS, the first episode of the McLEAN STEVENSON SHOW, THE NANCY WALKER SHOW, a whole bunch of strange situation comedies no one remembers. Currently, I'm writing the THAT'S INCREDIBLE show, I've written some adventure and sit-com pilots, a lot of ABC WEEKEND SPECIALS, a lot of Saturday morning shows, like THUNDARR and SCOOBY-DOO, RICHIE RICH, GOLDIE GOLD, and I just finished writing the YOGI BEAR CHRISTMAS SPECIAL. I spend about a third of my time writing live-action, a third writing animation, and a third writing comic books.

ROGER: *What about the comics society you started on the West Coast?*

MARK: There used to be no place for people who did comics to meet each other in L.A. The offices of Western Publishing out there didn't lend themselves, like the DC offices do here, to hanging around the halls, talking. Nor were there any comic conventions of note there. People who worked on the same comic for twenty-five years had never met. I am the central clearing point in L.A. for anyone who writes and draws comics. They call me if they need an inker or writer or reference. **Don Rico, Sergio Aragones** and I — everytime we were together — someone would say we should start a club. Finally we did, and we formed CAPS, which stands for Comic Art Professional Society. It's been going for five years. It meets the second Tuesday of every month. **Roger Slifer's** even been interviewed at meetings, among others. It's a wide cross-section of people who do comic strips, comic books and gag cartoons. We have one of every kind of cartoonist that ever lived: Political, underground, advertising, gag, dirty, Disney. We have sixty or seventy members, people like **Jack Kirby, Dan Spiegle, Roy Thomas.** We spend a lot of time talking. It's a social organization. People swap tips on jobs, pen points. We have panel discussions on the best paper to draw on, how to manage your career. Everybody swaps their knowledge. Once or twice a year, we have a banquet. At the first meeting, the writer of the WOODY WOODPECKER comic books for thirty years walked in and met the artist. They had not seen each other since they shared a bullpen at Walter Lantz Studios thirty-five years before. It also spares me from getting all those phone calls saying someone needs a letterer!

DAK: *What are you doing in comics currently, Mark?*

MARK: I'm doing the BLACKHAWK book here for DC. I write the dialogue for the GROO book from Pacific Comics. Sergio tells me the story and draws it, and in about an hour, I write all the dialogue for an issue. I don't take a writing credit, I usually tale a credit as decoder or translator. I'm also doing an alternate book with **Will Meugniot** for Eclipse Enterprises, the **DNAgents.** I keep busy!

DAK: *Thanks for taking the time to talk with us, Mark — it's really been fun!*

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From THE FLINTSTONES #8 — art by Dick Bickenbach and Lee Hooper, dialogue by Evanier.

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"I just got the bug real bad to do comics

WILL MEUGNIOT

In keeping with the format of Dave's magazine, I should say that Will and I were in conference in my mink-carpeted office at Ruby-Spears Enterprises in Hollywood. Mark Evanier joined us later.

STEVE GERBER: *You've been living in Los Angeles for how long?*

WILL MEUGNIOT: About three and a half years ago I started at Hanna-Barbera doing layouts on the GODZILLA and SUPER-FRIENDS shows and then I started doing storyboards for **Doug Wildey** and, during the tail end of the JANA OF THE JUNGLE and GODZILLA series, I started working as Doug's assistant doing storyboards and story board fixes and layout fixes and going down to Editing and basically having Doug educate me on how to make an animated film at Hanna-Barbera's expense. That was very fortunate because I got to learn everything, following the picture through final layout and checking. Then from there, I worked on the THING series and I went to Filmation where I became the action-adventure storyboard supervisor. I supervised boards on the second season of FLASH GORDON, on LONE RANGER . . . I started the ZORRO series and I started to work on the SHAZAM! series when I got a good offer from Marvel. So, for the last year or year and a half, I was at Marvel's animation studio, working on SPIDER-MAN and THE HULK.

Sometimes it's real depressing but, essentially, I spent about five years trying to break into comics and, about the time it looked like it was about to click, I started working in animation studios which offered more security and more money — so I went for that. This last year, I just had the dissatisfaction of not working on anything I could be really proud of.

STEVE: *I can understand . . .*

WILL: . . . so that's where the **DNAgents** came into my life. I just got the bug real bad to do comics again. Last spring, I was ghosting the SPIDER-MAN newspaper strip and then I took a vacation in Japan. And I realized that Japan is the greatest country in the world, if you're a comic book or animation fan. You can't get away from the characters. For instance, there's a show there now called DR. SLUMP that's the biggest merchandise success ever. You go to the stores and there are Dr. Slump displays . . . and what's really impressive about them is the copyright notice on them. It's not Marvel Comics and it's not Toei . . . it's the artist who owns that stuff. And by the time I got back to the States, I was convinced that there was no point in doing Spider-Man or the Hulk for Marvel when you can do something and you can own it now.

STEVE: *Was it your intention in the beginning that DNAgents — which you're working on with Mark Evanier — was going to be an independent comic book?*

WILL: Well, there was a possibility at one point during the negotiations — both Marvel and DC had expressed interest in it — but because both Mark and I had a background in television work in our relative fields, being popular with the

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Will Meugniot
Occupation: Artist
Residence: Los Angeles, California
Born: Othello, Washington
Credits: TV: Animation layouts for SUPER-FRIENDS, GODZILLA; storyboards for JANA OF THE JUNGLE, FLASH GORDON, THE LONE RANGER, SPIDER-MAN, THE HULK, etc. Comics: MARVEL CHILLERS starring Tigra; TARZAN and KORAK for overseas; THE DNAGENTS.
First Comic I Ever Read: When I was five years old, I went to a school fair with one of my parents' friends. At a carnival booth, he won an issue of TOM AND JERRY and had no use for it — so "the kid" got it. And that was the start of the addiction.

again. That's where the DNAgents came in . . ."

Will Meugniot in the Chinzanso Gardens in Tokyo, Japan. Below: Tank, from DNAgents #1.

studios, we would want to keep the TV rights and we would want to keep the merchandising rights.

STEVE: *You didn't need a conglomerate to sell it for you.*

WILL: That's right. It didn't sell this year because action-adventure shows are on the down-swing, but I'm very confident that, in the next couple years, there'll be interest in the **DNAgents** as a TV property. It gets to the point that the best package DC has to offer is that DC owns 80% and you own 20% and they have the trademarks and copyrights.

STEVE: *You really don't own anything. You wind up with a 20% interest in their character and that's divided between the writer and artist.*

WILL: Yes, it seems to me that's a very foolish deal. There are advantages behind it which I'm sure DC stresses — like you have their licensing company behind you. But, if you're already established in other fields . . . well, I probably have better contacts and Mark certainly has better contacts than the people in New York do.

STEVE: *That's true. But back to the comics . . . you did one HOWARD THE DUCK story that I dialogued and Mark plotted. We were going to do STEWART THE RAT together . . . but because of your schedule at Hanna-Barbera and the time it took me to do the script, we didn't get to it. What else have you done that people might be familiar with — or that they probably should go searching through the PRICE GUIDE for, once DNAgents becomes a hit?*

WILL: My first series at Marvel was the Tigra strip in MARVEL CHILLERS and, in the newest Overstreet Update, it has a negative rating . . .

MARK EVANIER: Meaning that **Bruce Hamilton** will pay you to take *his* copies.

WILL: Ah, **Mark Evanier** enters. No, that means that, as a collectible, it declines in value. My personal hope is to see that sucker shoot up there. I've already bought five hundred copies.

STEVE: *Yes, Mark Evanier has just joined us. This is a good time to really talk about the DNAgents and your contribution to it and Mark's.*

MARK (wheezing): I'll be in the oxygen tent, if you need me.

STEVE: *You've been running?*

MARK: No, it's just that it's after hours and everything's locked here and I had to go around the building about eleven times to find a way in.

STEVE: *You don't have a key?*

MARK: Come on. Would you trust a person dressed like this with a key?

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"The DNAgents is as close to a total

WILL: Well, now that Mark's here, I'm going to have to be honest.

MARK: Naah, go ahead and lie. That's what I did in New York.

WILL: The DNAgents is as close to a total collaboration as you're ever going to get between a writer and an artist.

MARK: See? He's off to a good start.

WILL (ignoring him): There are areas where Mark overlaps me on the graphics and there are areas where I overlap him on the writing. And, as far as who created what, we've discussed this and my feeling — and I think Mark's, too — is that as soon as you get into "I created this," that's the first sign that the team's going to disintegrate.

MARK: I created that thought. (Laughter.)

WILL: . . . and so we've both opted to be gentlemen and we'll only tell our true friends that each of us created everything by themselves.

STEVE: *Tell us a little bit about the strip. We have, as we know, another group of young super-heroes here. What makes this different from THE X-MEN and THE TEEN TITANS and THE LEGION? Or is it a rip-off, Will? (Laughter.)*

WILL: I think the basic difference — and I've been thinking about this — is that, in an odd way, the strip is actually produced with more of a California consciousness. It's much more laid-back. I think it's much less violent. It's more concerned with these people as individuals than other strips might be. For example, in the second issue, I'm up to about page eighteen and it's dawned on me that we only have about three pages in the issue where the characters are in their super costumes.

STEVE: *That is a departure, yes.*

WILL: And, for me, I think you're going to get to a point where you care about these people as people because they're going through a period in their lives where, essentially, they've come out of the test tubes and been thrown out into the world, prematurely. This is before they were fully-programmed and trained to deal with reality on the outside.

This comic is basically about a learning experience and they're going through that trauma like . . . well, for me, I'm a kid from a small town and then I moved to L.A. and, suddenly, you have to start dealing with people. I went through this experience . . . I'd spent about eight years essentially just seeing my wife and my family and I'd be sitting there, drawing every day, trying to learn how to draw. And then suddenly, you're thrown out there and you have to deal with new people and there's that excitement and terror of not knowing how to do it because you're not used to the superficialities and the way people conduct themselves in a normal business atmosphere. Basically, I think, we're trying to do something that's warmer and more human. And that stems from the creation of the book.

When we created the characters, instead of starting with the costumes and powers, we started with personalities and worked backwards from there. We decided that we'd have one character who was very strongly introverted and another character who had the ultimate identity crisis . . . that's Sham, the DNAgent who can change shape and take on personalities and, as a result, has no real identity of his own. And so we developed the personalities and then we worked up the costumes and then we worked out what the powers were and modified the costumes to suit the powers. Instead of saying, "Hey, let's have a big strong guy," we thought . . . when you're in school, there's always this guy who's bigger than the others and a little heavy and he's always very quiet . . . and he's never really a dominant force but he's always a nice guy.

STEVE: *Is the world ready for laid-back super-heroes?*

WILL: I don't know. We also have our aggressive jerk in the group. (Laughter.)

STEVE: *The token aggressive jerk. Who is he?*

WILL: He's Surge and, actually, he did start out to be more of an aggressive jerk but, now, he's . . . well, what's happening with these characters is that they're changing on us.

STEVE: *You're learning to like the ones you disliked . . .*

WILL: Yes.

STEVE: *Have his characteristics come to change? Is that's what's responsible for your liking him better? Or have you just come to understand him?*

WILL: I'm coming to understand him better.

STEVE: *There's an aggressive jerk in all of us, you know. (Laughter.) With some of us, it's right out on the surface.*

WILL: That's the side of me that wants to tear off animation writers' faces when I have to storyboard a bad script.

STEVE: *Are you enjoying working in the comics more than animation?*

WILL: Well, what's happened is that, after I got over the initial horror of walking away from a good weekly check and medical benefits and all that . . .

STEVE: *That's hard to do.*

WILL: I know. But I actually love the comic. I get up in the morning . . . the work room I have is next door to my

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SHAM.

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RAINBOW.

collaboration as you're ever going to get . . ."

© 1983 Evanier & Meugniot

These two pages: Unpublished model-sheet pencils by Meugniot.

TANK.

bedroom and I kind of stumble out and before I visit the john, I walk over and focus my eyes on what's on the table and I go, "Well, I get to draw this, today!" It feels good, because the drawings actually get a little better every day. Whereas, doing storyboards, because of the time pressure, your drawing actually gets a little worse every day.

STEVE: *Well, actually, the thing that I find very attractive about the comics — and you probably do, too — is that what you put on that paper is the finished product. Granted, an inker or colorist is going to work over it but there are five steps . . .*

WILL: . . . instead of it going through about five hundred hands, about two-thirds of them probably Korean that don't speak the same language and don't have the same graphic sensibilities that we do.

STEVE: *Okay, now. Mark, you've sat silently through all of this. Tell us something about the creation of the DNAgents . . . and one other thing that's very interesting, that I have had experience with but probably not too many other creators have . . . this book was represented to the publishers by an agent, wasn't it?*

MARK: Mike Friedrich of Star*Reach Productions functioned as our agent. Mike approached me many months ago, feeling that now that there is room for negotiation in the comic book field — where it once wasn't permitted — there is also room for agents. I've known Mike for well over ten years and Will and I decided to let Mike run with this. He submitted it to five publishers and got interest from all five publishers and the people at Eclipse seemed to be the ones we wanted to work with. The **Mullaneys** were very enthusiastic about the project . . . they seemed willing to promote it properly. They seemed the least anxious to interfere with us. They weren't out to promote a company "look." And from there on in, it was merely a matter of Mike coming to terms with them. As far as *why* we wanted to do the book: Among dozens of things that Will and I have in common . . . including the experience of going from working in a room for months at a time by yourself and, all of a sudden, discovering there's a world out there, we both have a great interest in what are sneeringly called "romance" comics . . .

WILL: Yes.

MARK: One of my goals — and I think one of Will's, too — is to one day do a romance comic — and I don't mean a romance comic the way people today think of them . . .

STEVE: *Oddly enough, I once submitted an idea like that. A number of people have wanted to do that.*

MARK: I once submitted one to Marvel and had them halfway convinced to do it, but they were not interested in doing what I felt had to be done, which was to advance that *genre* the way super-heroes have been advanced. The super-hero comic has been reinvented a few times . . . in 1961 with the FANTASTIC FOUR, for example. The romance comic has not changed since the day **Simon** and **Kirby** did the first MY DATE.

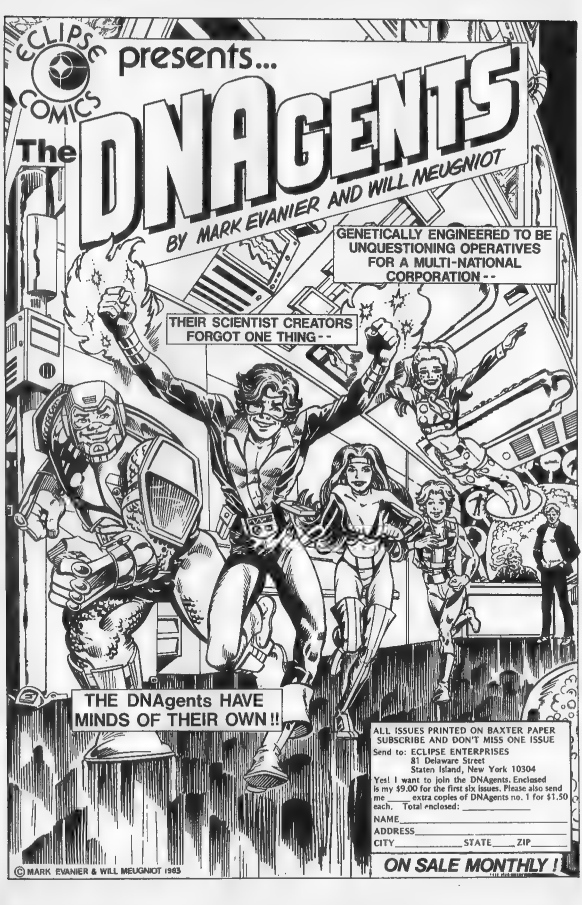
STEVE: *They're still on the same date.*

MARK: Yes. Not only that, but "love comics" became a repository for the writers and artists who were unemployed elsewhere or paid the least. You know, if they'd taken the same editorial expertise with super-hero comics, DC and Marvel would both now be Kentucky Colonel franchises. Super-hero comics became more human, but the love comics never have evolved, as they should have, into a deeper kind of human-interest comic. You *can* do that, these days, but unfortunately, you have to kind of couch it in the guise of a super-hero book or a war book.

I discovered in doing BLACKHAWK, for example, that the thing that was making the book work, such as it does, was not the planes and the hardware and the goose-stepping and the explosions . . . it was the personalities of the characters and their conflicts and interaction. When we got into **The DNAgents**, the thing that interested me most was not the fact that it was a teen-age super-hero group but, rather, the fact that we had this theme of "awakening" and you could do personality stories, do a super-hero comic where the personalities were natural extensions of the plot and action elements. If the book works, it'll work on that basis.

If people want to see a comic with a lot of hard action and comic characters pummelling each other, there are other books which will satisfy them more. But, lately, that has not been what has been supported. The comics with the most vociferous fan followings in the last few years have been those that have had a human touch to them, somehow.

STEVE: *Although I must say, looking at*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"I love the comic. It gets better every day."

the artwork, this is some of the best stuff Will has ever done and that, visually, the book is not going to be any slouch, either.

MARK: Well, Will's career is interesting. I don't know if he talked about how he got into comics before I got here . . .

STEVE: *No.*

MARK: Well, I first saw Will's work up in **Tony Isabella's** apartment in New York in the Summer of 1975. I was editing the foreign comics for the **Edgar Rice Burroughs** company at that time and Will had done two or three issues of **TIGRA**. They didn't quite have an inker, they had finger-painting. He was inexperienced. The pencils didn't necessarily warrant being inked in gold leaf . . .

WILL: Aw, come on.

MARK: . . . but what had happened was that he had somehow been faulted for the finished books, even though he'd been working with virtually no guidance and, of course, had no control over the inking. And Marvel was in no rush to give him more work. I saw Xeroxes of the pencils and I said, "This guy's got a lot of potential, if he can just get the chance to do a lot of drawing." When you find a rough talent, that's usually all it takes.

Tony felt the same way I did, but he'd been unable to convince anyone at Marvel. So I began using Will on the foreign TARZAN and KORAK comics and he improved and he improved phenomenally with each story. Finally, he drifted into animation, which was probably very good for his bank account, but it was kind of a shame for those of us who love good comic-book art.

STEVE: *If I can interject, animation is not a profession that's conducive to establishing an individual style.*

MARK: You can make a difference, but there are often too many other people making a difference on your difference. And one of the attractions of doing comics — and I think this applies to all of us — is that, good, bad or indifferent, what you do is going to reach the reader in roughly the form that you did it. Some people like the anonymity of working in animation, they like blending into an assembly line and a house style. The fun of doing **The DNAgents** is that Will and I are controlling some characters completely.

Ostensibly, anyway. Actually, we have learned that the characters are really controlling us.

I did a text page in the first issue which no one will believe, but it's very honest that, by the time we got to the end of the first issue, Will and I were looking at each other going, "Oh, so *that's* what this comic is about." We discovered the characters were telling us what the comic was about. The theme of the book changed.

STEVE: *What was the theme you started out with, and what did it end up as?*

MARK: Well, it started out being about corporations that try to own people. This being a theme that both Will and I have experienced, first-hand.

STEVE: *And one that is close to my heart.*

MARK: You find in every corporation, people who will embrace the corporation like it is Daddy. This applies to every company that has ever existed, without exception. You have people who cling to the company and do everything they can for the company, thinking the company will take care of them. They basically allow the company to own them, figuring the firm will be good to its own property. You can always spot these people because they're the ones who, in the end, really get reamed. They get it the worst, because they lose all dependence on themselves as individuals. This was the theme Will and I started out with, and it's still in the comic, but it's gotten shoved into a subcutaneous position.

We discovered that we had concocted these characters, who were going through this process that we all go through — having to cope with being out in the world and functioning and learning about people. Will was living in Barstow and other places, sitting at his drawing board and meeting no one. I was sitting in my bedroom, typing DAFFY DUCK comics for years, meeting no one. I had a very narrow realm of existence.

Then, one day, I started working in television and Will started working in

Early Marvel sample page — Will's pencils for Tigra.

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"So much of this book is drawn from our pasts . . ."

G.I. JOE
A REAL AMERICAN HERO!™
G.I. JOE #2
MARVEL PRODUCTIONS, LTD.
Page 3 Prod.
© 1983 Hasbro Industries
SLOW BIG PAN
HAWK DROPS BACK AND FALLS AWAY FROM CAMERA AS COBRA TROOPER RUNS INTO PAN, COMBAT KNIFE IN HIS HAND. ON GROUND... G.I. HELICOPTER ZOOMS PAST BEHIND HAWK. JET PAINTED BY SCARLETT BANKS INTO SC #6 FG.
for freedom
IN FRONT OF CAPTURED BUILDINGS ...COBRA TURNS THEIR LASER WEAPONS AS PARACHUTES AND PLANES MOVE THRU IN BG... THE SOLDIERS ABORT TO!
CONT
THEN SCATTER AS HAWK ZOOMS INTO SC, TEARING DOWN THE COBRA FLAG... (THE COBRA MEN DIVE O.S. AS HAWK'S RAY BURSTS HIT THEIR LASER CANNONS.)
SFX: RISING ROCKET WHINE
whenever there's
TILT PAN SET-UP
CONT
HAWK ZOOMS AND CAMERA HIS BODY FILLS THE SCREEN AND MOVES TO THE NEXT SC.....
A COBRA HOVERCRAFT ZOOMS THRU SC. THREE COBRA SOLDIERS RUN INTO SC (TOWARDS CAMERA E). MISSILES ZOOM IN, EXPLODING IN BG. ARROW INTO SC FROM CHIEF CAMERA....
AND DROPS A NET OVER THE FLEEING COBRA MEN....
trouble
G.I. Joe

Storyboard for Marvel Productions' second G.I. JOE TV spot, "Cobra Trap!" Script and pencils by Will, inks by Rich Hoberg, ink assist and lettering by Larry Houston. Astute readers will have noticed that the finished art for Hawk was printed last issue on page 61.

television and, our first days on our respective jobs, we each met more human beings than we'd met in all the days since we got out of high school. Every person goes through this awakening process if they become a total human being. If not, they stay in their little cocoons.

WILL: That's right. I think the original book would have been a much darker book and much more violent than the way it's evolved. It's like what I said about Surge. I think he's ended up being a much more likeable character.

MARK: You know, there are a lot of people in comics who do certain books — or do them certain ways — because they think they're being commercial. More often than not, they're wrong. What we wanted to do was a book that would interest us. Super-hero teams happen to be very commercial right now, so it was easier to find a publisher interested in doing this kind of book than some of the other ideas we've had . . . but it was a book we wanted to do.

WILL: Yes. And I'll tell you the thing that provided the final piece. We were already into writing and drawing it, when Mark came up with the idea to have the characters enroll in college. Immediately, that opened up possibilities for interaction and personality development that are totally lacking in books like THE X-MEN or THE NEW MUTANTS.

STEVE: *One of my big objections to those books is that the characters have their own buildings, their own world . . .*

WILL: And now, **The DNAgents** are thrown out into real life. You know, the first day I started working at Hanna-Barbera, I met **Doug Wildey** and . . . **Rick Hoberg** was waiting in terror in the lobby, having gone through the same ordeal as me. **Dave Stevens** had just started up in the layout department.

It's that same thing . . . these people are meeting folks who are going to be their friends or enemies for life. It's those first contacts that you're seeing.

So much of this book is drawn from our pasts . . . these characters not only write themselves, they draw themselves. I've got to admit that there are moments when I don't quite catch it. But then there are moments when I draw something or **Mark** writes something and we hit a nerve . . . and that's when this book feels right.

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CI-5

"Bob Kane was doing BATMAN for National.

Sixty of us applied as art assistant."

GEORGE ROUSSOS

George Roussos, a soft-spoken man with an ever-present brush in his hand and twinkle in his eye, occupies a small, dark room in Marvel's labyrinth of offices, where four days a week he colors virtually all of the covers that Marvel publishes. A top colorist on staff for the past 11 years, George has had a long and varied career since the heyday of comics in the 1940s, when he worked at the Bob Kane studio on BATMAN. He has penciled, inked, lettered, and colored comic books for a host of publishers, and worked closely with many of the top talents in comics, preferring to remain out of the limelight himself. Marvel editor Mark Gruenwald conducted this interview with George, an acquaintance and collaborator of his for the past five years, over french fries and tuna melts one lunch hour. . .

MARK GRUENWALD: *When did you first get into the business?*

GEORGE ROUSSOS: 1939. I was going to high school in Queens at the time.

MARK: *What was the first company you worked for?*

GEORGE: **Bob Ripley's** BELIEVE IT OR NOT syndicated strip. I did lettering for the Spanish Department. I got the job because I could letter in **Ripley's** distinctive style. I also did some touching up of stats, and occasional small drawings.

MARK: *So you were lettering in Spanish. Can you read Spanish?*

GEORGE: No. But it wasn't as hard as it sounds. I know Greek, and there's a lot of similarity between the two languages.

MARK: *You worked for Ripley while in high school?*

GEORGE: For a year or so, and then I went into comics.

MARK: *What was the first comic-book company you worked for?*

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: George Roussos
Occupation: Artist
Residence: Islip, New York
Born: 19 August 1925, Washington, DC
Credits: RIPLEY'S BELIEVE IT OR NOT, BATMAN for **Bob Kane's** studio, DETECTIVE COMICS, **Lev Gleason's** original DAREDEVIL, FAMILY COMICS, THE FANTASTIC FOUR, etc.
Favorite Sign of Zodiac: Gemini. I always get involved with Geminis. The first artist who helped me out — **Stan Kaye** — was a Gemini. So was the second, **Mort Meskin.** My two wives were Geminis. **Mark Gruenwald** is a Gemini, and so is **David Kraft.** If I went to the North Pole, I'm sure I'd hook up with another Gemini.

GEORGE: I answered an ad for **Bob Kane** who was doing BATMAN for National. There were about sixty of us who applied for the job as art assistant.

MARK: *Kane had his own studio?*

GEORGE: Right. In the New York Times building.

MARK: *How many people were working in this studio?*

GEORGE: Just **Jerry Robinson** and then me. Jerry was doing inking for Bob, but he needed a background man and a letterer. I had been practicing to be an assistant for a syndicated strip artist — lettering and background inks. So, when **Bob Kane** saw my samples, he hired me over the others, since he wouldn't have to teach me anything. Plus, the first story he gave me was about railroads, and I used to draw railroads all the time.

MARK: *Bob Kane didn't work at his own studio?*

GEORGE: No. Bob would work at home. It was hard to make the deadlines, because Jerry was a heavy sleeper. I used to have to go to the Bronx to get him to come to work. I'd go and wake him up 2 o'clock in the afternoon so we could work all night. **Bob Kane's** father — an insurance broker — used to drop in and see how we were coming along. We were committed to do about 13 pages a week. Jerry was always behind — he was always whiting out things and re-inking them. Bob's stuff was so sketchy, Jerry had to do a lot of work. My work was quite easy. I used to erase

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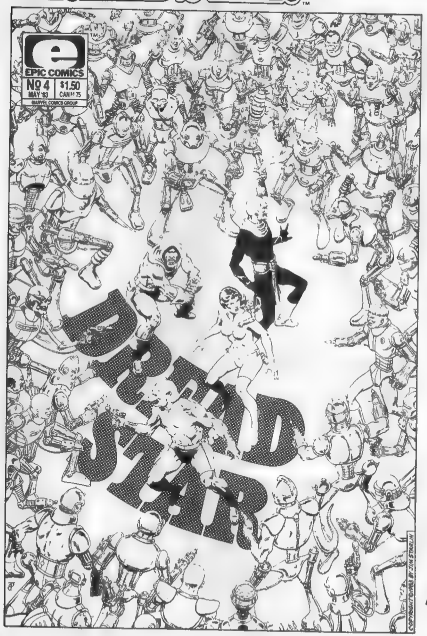

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"There was a feeling of excitement around Stan."

This page and next: AZEENA, a proposed science fiction newspaper strip, 1967.

Bob's backgrounds and put my own in. I'd put big moons in and make the shadows large and full. I did shadows for effect, rather than realism. It gave the strip its unreal look.

So, Bob's father would come down to see how many pages we finished and deliver them to National for us. We used to hide the pages underneath the NEW YORK TIMES so he couldn't see how much we had left to do. We called him "The Detective," since he always found them anyway. National wanted more Batman material — it was quite popular — so they called us into the office and made us a deal. We wanted to pick up other work outside, but they didn't like the idea, so they offered us a lot of money to work at the office where they could keep an eye on us. Since Jerry and I had developed such a strong artistic look for **Kane** — always a big moon with harsh lights and shadows — they didn't want us to use that style for anyone else. We had worked with this fellow, **Bob Wood**, who later did the original DAREDEVIL, on a feature called TARGET AND THE TARGETEERS. Bob was just starving at the time trying to meet his deadlines, so I used to stay up all night for 2 or 3 days in a row while everyone fell asleep, helping out.

With us the TARGETEERS strip began to move. And it was in a style similar to **Bob Kane's** awkward style of drawing. Jerry would ink the figures, I'd do backgrounds and when we got through, the end product was almost identical to **Kane's** BATMAN. The lettering was the same, the balloon shapes, the inking, and the blacks. When the sales started to pick up, National realized we were competing with BATMAN. That's when they called us in, and they said "listen, we'll give you all the money you want. Why don't you come to work just with us?" It was better for me that way because then I'd get a check from the office, not from **Bob Kane**.

Kane used to do a funny thing. We'd get paid every Friday afternoon, but we had to pick it up before 5 o'clock. He was Jewish, though not very strict in most respects, and for him the Sabbath began exactly at 5. So, Jerry and I would have to take a subway train to get our check. But if we'd walk in a minute after 5, he'd say "Sorry, no check." You can see why I was glad to get paid from National.

MARK: *Who was the editor of BATMAN at the time?*

GEORGE: When I started it was **Whitney Ellsworth**, who later left to go to Hollywood when they were doing the SUPERMAN TV show. He was a very good editor, more clever than most of them. If you did good work and followed the basic guidelines it was a feather in his hat, so he never bothered you. He gave writers and artists a lot of freedom.

MARK: *How often did you see BATMAN writer Bill Finger?*

GEORGE: Only once or twice. He liked me right away. He was the one who told Bob to hire me. He saw the trains that I did and said they were close to what he had asked for in the script. What was good about Bill was that whenever he wrote a plot, he did a lot of research for it. Whether the setting was a railroad station or a factory, he would find photo reference, usually from NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC, and give Bob all the research to draw from. He was very orderly and methodical. His only problem was that he couldn't sustain the work . . . he couldn't produce material regularly enough.

MARK: *He just couldn't keep up with the deadlines?*

GEORGE: He had a certain nervousness. He was always finding excuses how not to get to the typewriter.

MARK: *But generally, Bill would deliver a finished script?*

GEORGE: Then **Bob Kane** would in-

"In the early '40s . . . I did the first

terpret it, and change some things.

MARK: *So, how long did you work for National?*

GEORGE: I was on staff for four years approximately, in the early '40s. At the same time, I did the first CAPTAIN AMERICA with a friend of mine, **Bernie Klein,** who's dead now. We did a certain amount of pages of backgrounds, because he knew my background style was strong.

MARK: *This was for the Simon/Kirby studio?*

GEORGE: No, just the guy who had the account to do the background work.

MARK: *Did you get a chance to meet Simon and Kirby then?*

GEORGE: No, I didn't meet them 'til later when they came to National and did the BOY COMMANDOS.

MARK: *You didn't let National know you were helping on CAPTAIN AMERICA?*

GEORGE: Well, it didn't matter, in that case. It was such a small thing, it really didn't matter. It's only when we started doing a feature for another company that became direct competition.

MARK: *After your four years at National on staff, what did you do?*

GEORGE: I went freelance, and they had me do a 7-page back-up feature called AIR WAVE. The strip was originally done by a friend of mine, **Harris Levy,** under the pseudonym **Lee Harris.** When he went into the Army, Ellsworth said to me, "Why don't you take it over?" And I started with that.

MARK: *You both drew and inked AIR WAVE?*

GEORGE: And colored it.

MARK: *How about the lettering?*

GEORGE: I think I did that too . . . a complete job.

MARK: *AIR WAVE, as I recall, was in ACTION COMICS.*

GEORGE: Yeah. He was quite silly. He wore stupid roller skates, skated on powerlines and listened to radio waves.

MARK: *And you were still working on BATMAN, freelance, while you were doing AIR WAVE?*

GEORGE: Yeah, right.

MARK: *So, how many years does that bring us to?*

GEORGE: Well, I worked 30 years for National, as I recall. There were some changes in between. I did other stories for other companies. I worked a couple of years with **Jerry Robinson** later on. We used to do Harvey Comics. We used to do the GREEN HORNET newspaper strip for a while, but it didn't go over too well. Also, in 1945, I did industrial comics for General Electric. That was one of the biggest things I've ever worked on. I was one of the first people to do ads in the comic books. The man who used to solicit the ads for National, got together with the man from General Electric public relations, and decided to do a special comic. I did four pages of samples to show them how it would look. Comics were selling so good it was obvious that children would rather read them than their school books, so someone had the idea to do comic books about electricity. The story was about a superhero, who let you know facts about electricity along the way. I did about 16 books in all. According to the DAILY NEWS, which did a Sunday feature on it, there were some 68 million

CAPTAIN AMERICA with a friend of mine."

books distributed worldwide.

MARK: *When did you finally get to Atlas, or Marvel?*

GEORGE: Marvel? Well, since I was freelancing, I could work anywhere I wanted. I felt if one company held me up, I'd need other sources of income. So, I went to **Stan Lee**, who wanted mystery stories at the time. Stan liked my work, and gave me good prices. There was a feeling of excitement around Stan. I always like to associate with someone who is alive.

National was beginning to shift in a way, becoming more conservative. When **Ellsworth** left, they split up the books among a whole staff of editors. I was no longer working for one guy — I was working for five, and it was a lot of effort to sell your work to so many personalities.

I had always kept a hand in with Stan, and he gave me work periodically. And when he started the Marvel line of characters in the early '60s, he offered me a staff job. I never wanted to work for them, because then-publisher **Martin Goodman** was a funny guy — if the books sold, he hired a lot of people, but if the books didn't sell, everybody was out of work. At National, on the other hand, whether the books sold or not, you got your check on time.

Stan was behind on all his deadlines because most of the guys he worked with were very slow. I could sit down and ink 24 pages in about a day. I sat down with a pen and outlined a whole job in about 10 hours — less with a brush — then went back and spotted blacks. But I wouldn't bring it in the next day, because I didn't want them to know I was so fast.

What happened is that I began to read Stan's stories — I never paid much attention to the stories before — and I found something interesting was going on. The stories had humor and excitement, qualities that National was lacking at the time.

MARK: *How would you compare the two companies in the '60s?*

GEORGE: Marvel was very small compared to National. It seemed to have no foothold in the market at all. Stan was the editor, the writer, and the relative of **Mr. Goodman**, as well. **Goodman** was never too convinced of Stan's new ideas.

MARK: *Working for Marvel you called yourself George Bell. Why?*

GEORGE: I didn't want to rub my name in National's face, since I was still doing freelance work for them.

MARK: *National, at that time, did not credit the creative people?*

GEORGE: That's right, for the most part. They did on some of the strips. **Stan Lee**, however, emphasized the credits.

MARK: *You inked some of the early FANTASTIC FOURs over Kirby . . .*

GEORGE: Yeah, I inked a lot of the early ones.

MARK: *Were you still freelance during this entire time? I remember seeing you ink a JUSTICE LEAGUE over Mike Sekowsky . . .*

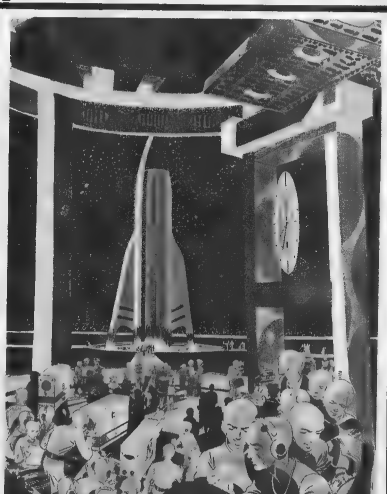
GEORGE: Yes, I wasn't on staff.

MARK: *When was it that you finally came on staff at Marvel?*

GEORGE: 1972. Prior to that, **John Verpoorten** used to call me in to do emergency inking or coloring. **Roy Thomas** would say, "George is coming in. Now we'll get the book out."

"Stan Lee's approach to comics is that he

MARK: *How is it that you're known primarily now for doing coloring? What kind of background did you have?*
GEORGE: I always colored my own artwork. And I used to experiment with coloring, too.
MARK: *Did most of the inkers and embellishers color their own work?*
GEORGE: Not all of them. I just happen to . . .
MARK: *How come?*
GEORGE: Two reasons. I always felt the black-and-white artwork was not complete in itself, and color was a part of the total look. Secondly, I wanted to use color to cover up some of my bad drawing. Other colorists would bring it out.
MARK: *(Laughter.) Knock it out in a dark color and they can't see how you inked it!*
GEORGE: And then I started to invent ideas, like how to make a white area seem whiter than the paper it was printed on. I got ideas on how to do that. I worked from one extreme of the spectrum to the other in color.
MARK: *So, your background in coloring is all your own, it's all out of your head. You really had no technical training, even in high school?*
GEORGE: No, I never had schooling. The only training I had is with a fellow who worked for National, **Stan Kaye,** who used to work with illustrators, critique their work. Stan liked me, and he saw my enthusiasm — I wanted to learn, and I didn't go to school, and he was someone in the business, and he was very kind enough to take his time. He would take my illustration and we'd work it out. I learned many things from this guy.
MARK: *Not only coloring but composition . . .*
GEORGE: Yeah, well everything — coloring — to make it right. It has to have composition, otherwise it's just all color thrown all over the matte. So, there's a certain amount of organization. But it didn't stop my rebellious nature to do it the way I wanted. I still have a system of organizing colors. Otherwise, I don't care how wild the coloring is, if it's organized, then it's good. It's just when you do it haphazardly that it ends in chaos.
MARK: *In 1972, you came on to Marvel on staff?*
GEORGE: Doing corrections, like **John Tartaglione** is now doing. Small corrections. In the meantime, **Marie Severin** was itching to quit. She wanted to pencil.
MARK: *Marie was the head colorist?*
GEORGE: Right. I said to Marie, "I'm interested in color. I'd like to do color." And she said, "Well, if you're interested."



"2001 A.D." Sunday newspaper page proposed by George in 1945.

So, I did a couple of things. And she showed them to **Stan Lee,** who said, "That's what I've been looking for all this time!" Stan used to hate grays. He told me, "I don't want to see this pastel, hazy stuff. I don't want to see grays. We don't want to prove to the audience that we can color. We want something simple, powerful, and direct." I said, "Okay, Stan." When I gave him what he wanted, he'd come in and rave. I got along very nicely with him. He'd want minor changes, but I understood the basics of what he wanted.
MARK: *When you became head colorist in 1972 you mostly handled the covers?*
GEORGE: I never actually became head of the department, I just became a staff colorist who just did covers.
MARK: *Other than the things that Stan Lee told you about the directness and simplicity of color, are there any personal philosophies of color that you have?*
GEORGE: Let's see . . . the background color is there to emphasize the basic emotion of a situation — I can't force the situation, however. When a cover is passive, I can't do very much with it, except do nice neat coloring. I also like to unify compositions by creating circles of color, making the eye focus on the important parts of the picture. I work a lot of things in that most people aren't aware of — shapes and abstractions are what give compositions drama. That's instinct with me. I worked a lot with **Bill Flagor.** I learned a lot from him. **Stan Lee** went for impact — with **Jim Shooter,** there's a consistent approach to cover coloring, so

made them fanciful but understandable."

I always know what he wants.

MARK: *Besides the covers, you also do coloring on a freelance basis on several books at Marvel . . .*

GEORGE: THOR, CONAN, and THE DEFENDERS, I do regularly.

MARK: *Having been in the business as long as you have, how does it look to you at present?*

GEORGE: Conditions in the industry right now are excellent. I'm making good money, I'm working for editors who like me, the guys I work with are basically decent here, and the freedom is tremendous. And with the money that we're making today, I finally have a few dollars in the bank. All those years I worked many hours, but I never saved a penny, because I was going from one check to another.

MARK: *Did you ever imagine that you were going to stay in the comic business this long?*

GEORGE: I never really gave it a thought. I have an intense feeling for comics. I feel it's a terrific medium of expression. You can write humor, which I like — you can do anything. You can tease people with certain things, you can develop things, and it's a beautiful, simple medium to draw. Because of my enthusiasm for it, and belief in it, I worked very hard at it. Other people saw that in me, and as long as somebody likes your work, you'll survive in this business.

MARK: *Do you think comics have gone about as far as they can as an art form?*

GEORGE: I cannot say. There's a tendency for certain comic people to get too superficial. After awhile they'll lose their audience.

MARK: *What do you mean by superficial?*

GEORGE: Superficial is where a writer or artist brings in elements not appropriate to the medium that he's working in. Somehow, he's stepping out of its context.

MARK: *You're saying some people try things too sophisticated for the confines of the medium?*

GEORGE: Right. It's like trying to make da da da da into **Chopin** — it's not going to work on a toy piano.

MARK: *Do you think writers and artists sometimes write beyond the interests of their comic-reading audience?*

GEORGE: I think there's a tendency to do that. A writer's own development sometimes carries him away from the traditional things that make comics work. Stories that don't seem to have any substance, or real story content — they're fanciful for its own sake. It's like dissonance for the sake of dissonance. What I liked about **Stan Lee's** approach to comics, is that he made them down-to-earth, fanciful but with a very understandable basis.

MARK: *What are some of the artists whose styles and works you admire?*

GEORGE: Well, the artist I like best is **Chester Gould.** His work on DICK TRACY is simple, almost like blue prints. Yet he could do anything within its guidelines, It had intensity, and an understanding of the comics medium. It's always the people who have no understanding who become overcomplicated. Whenever you have a lot of technique, you have no substance. It's usually a disguise for something. You find artists with slick drawings who have nothing to say.

MARK: *Anybody else whose work you respect?*

GEORGE: Well, there're a few good people working today. Like **Tom Palmer,** he's a very interesting artist. **Walter Simonson** is very good, and **Bob Layton,** he does some things very well.

MARK: *I guess you were never really a comics "fan," since you started working in the field so young . . .*

GEORGE: Well, when I was a kid, I was a fan. In school, I liked the newspaper strips. There weren't many comic books. There was LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE, they had black-and-white DICK TRACY. We liked them. I used to keep up with everything.

MARK: *What are your current interests outside of comics now?*

GEORGE: Photography. I took it up after I gave up experimenting in comics. It's like a boil — if you push it over here, it's going to come up somewhere else. So, I took to experimenting with photography.

MARK: *When did you start?*

GEORGE: In the '50s. And I kept at it, looking at everything, changing my approach all the time. Anything I do, I work at this way. It keeps things interesting.

MARK: *If you had it all to do over again, would you stick with comics?*

GEORGE: Absolutely.

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FANTASTIC FOUR
232 ..... .50
234, 235 ..... .35 ea.
236 *(20th Ann.)* ..... .60
237-239 ..... .40 ea.

FANTASTIC FOUR ROAST
1 *(Hembeck, Miller, Golden, etc.)* ..... .70

FOR YOUR EYES ONLY
1 ..... .10

GATES OF EDEN
1 *(Kaluta, Lwalohia, P.C. Russell, etc.)* 1.75

GREEN ARROW
1 *(Mini-series; Von Eden)* ..... .40

INDIANA JONES
1 *(Byrne/Austin)* ..... .40

KAMANDI
59 *(Starlin)* ..... .30

KULL
2 *(Baxter; Bolton; 48 pgs.)* 1.25

LEGION OF SUPER HEROES
298 *(Amethyst insert)* ..... .45
300 *(Mando; Giffen)* ..... .90

MARVEL AND D.C. PRESENTS
1 *(Baxter, X-Men/Teen Titans)* 1.50

MARVEL FANFARE
6 (C.P. Russell) ..... .95
8 ..... .90

MARVEL GRAPHIC NOVEL
4 *(New Mutants)* 3.25
5 *(X-Men)* 6.75
6 *(Starslammers; Simonson)* 3.60

MARVEL PREMIERE
50 *(Alice Cooper; Austin)* ..... .25

MARVEL UNIVERSE
1 ..... .75
3 ..... .65

MR. MYSTIC
1 *(Adams)* ..... .60

NEW MUTANTS
2 ..... .45
4 ..... .40

NEW TEEN TITANS
16 *(Capt. Carrot insert)* ..... .60

OMEGA MEN
1 *(Baxter, Giffen)* ..... .60
2, 3 *(3 due 3/83)* ..... 7.00 ea.

PACIFIC PRESENTS
1 *(Dave Stevens)* ..... .65

ROMAN
1 *(2.50 retail; Frank Miller; due 4/83)* 1.70

STARSLAYER
2 *(Dave Stevens – 1st appearance Rocketeer)* ..... .85

STAR TREK
1 ..... .10

STAR WARS
39 *(Williamson; part 1 Empire)* ..... .40

TEAM AMERICA
1 ..... .20

TWISTED TALES
1 *(Baxter; Corben, Conrad)* ..... .90

WARP
1 *(Brunner)* ..... .65

WHAT IF
35 *(Miller)* ..... .60

WOLVERINE
3, 4 *(Miller)* ..... .40 ea.

X-MEN
147-149 ..... .50 ea.
166 *(double-sized)* ..... .70
167 *(New Mutants appear)* ..... .45
168-170 ..... .40 ea.
171 *(due 3/83)* ..... .35

"I wanted to have a company on Madison Avenue."

GARY BRODSKY

Photo: Jim Salicrup

The first time I saw Gary Brodsky, he was ambling down the hallowed halls of Marvel wearing faded bluejeans and a Levi vest, not at all what you might expect an up-and-coming entrepreneur to look like. Years later, he's got his own company — Garco Systems — and several publishing successes to his credit. But he's still startlingly offbeat with a style all his own. Jim Salicrup and I recently spent an evening talking with this young publisher about his new projects . . .

JIM SALICRUP: *Gary, what was it like, growing up as Sol Brodsky's son — did the other kids know your father was a comic-book artist?*

GARY BRODSKY: Actually, none of my friends seemed to care. It was the older kids that really cared. And I never knew what they were talking about. I just figured my father was a regular Joe, just like other kids' fathers.

JIM: *Did you know Stan Lee or Jack Kirby?*

GARY: Yeah. I grew up knowing them, so it didn't seem like anything special.

JIM: *Did you read comics?*

GARY: No.

JIM: *So how did your book, THE COMIC BOOK ART WORKSHOP, come about?*

GARY: I don't know why, but I wanted to have a company on Madison Avenue. I started a company, got an office, and didn't know what to do. I was doing a lot of freelance jobs here and there, but I was missing a lot of big clients.

JIM: *What kind of freelance?*

GARY: Packaging books. Children's books, coloring books, game books, activities, toys. And I was missing a lot of big clients and big money, because I didn't have a company, I was just Gary Brodsky, individual. So, I figured to get the big clients and the big money, I would form my own company that would sound bigger than it was.

JIM: *Which is — ?*

GARY: Garco Systems, which is named after me, Gary Company.

JIM: *Has it been successful?*

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Gary Brodsky
Occupation: Entrepreneur.
Residence: Garco Systems, 2938 Brighton, 12th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11235.
Born: 18 March 1957 in Brooklyn.
Credits: Publisher: COMIC ART WORKSHOP series, etc. Coloring-book Artist: SPIDER-MAN, HULK, MIGHTY MOUSE, G.I. JOE, etc.
Favorite Beatle: I don't like the Beatles.
Favorite Drink: I don't drink. All I do is throw up. That's no fun.
Favorite Game: War.

"I was as broke as a person can get.

GARY: Now it is. In the beginning, there were a lot of problems. I call it the Depression of '82. It ended in March of that year. I was as broke as a person can get. I went to an amusement park with my girlfriend, **Ann**, and she had to give me fifty cents to go on a ride. I'm serious.

DAK: *How did it happen?*

GARY: The first four months were great — and that's what caused the bankruptcy. I thought life would continually follow suit. The first four months, I packaged an entire line of toys for a company and I made a fortune. Not really a fortune. A small fortune. (In case the IRS is listening.) So I figured if life is going to be like this, I may as well spend it. I took out credit and everything else, and at the end of four months there was no other income. Somehow, my company went from a lot of money to eight dollars.

DAK: *There's a lesson there somewhere.*

GARY: I had moved out of my parents' place and was living in Manhattan under awful circumstances. So I came home and told my father, "I'm in a bit of financial trouble. I'm in tremendous debt." And he being the type of person he is, said, "Let me help you out. List your debts." I had about fifty thousand dollars in debts. And he said, "How much money do you have?" And I had sixty cents in change in my pocket. That's about it. He just took the paper and tore it up and said, "We'll have to work another way." (Laughter.)

JIM: *How is Garco doing these days?*

GARY: I have $1.20 now. Actually these days, I'm doing better than ever. I got more business than I know what to do with. In fact, I have taken in a partner, **Brian Moore.** And if he doesn't remind me what we're doing, I forget.

JIM: *Well, what are you doing?*

GARY: Publishing and co-publishing books and toys. I do paper toys — coloring books and puzzles for a company from Israel.

JIM: *What about THE COMIC BOOK ART WORKSHOP?*

GARY: Volume two is out.

DAK: *How did the first COMIC ART WORKSHOP volume do?*

GARY: Pretty well. In fact, we sold out — that's how well it did.

JIM: *What's the response been like from the people who bought the first book?*

GARY: They wanted to know why it was so late.

JIM: *Why was it?*

GARY: Dick kept re-editing it and there were a couple of changes.

DAK: *How did you get Dick Giordano and John Romita to work on it?*

GARY: I asked them. I called them up and within ten minutes they said yes without any problems. It's as easy as that. Getting the work from them was a little harder.

JIM: *How's the second book going to be different from the first?*

GARY: It's got a lot more pages. It's up from forty-eight to sixty-four. And we've got the rights to use characters. We've got some of the big syndicated strip artists — and we've got **John Byrne.**

DAK: *Are you planning to come out with more volumes?*

GARY: We're planning four volumes, and possibly a couple of other books in the comic line, such as expert tips on drawing by different artists. I have a couple books under contract, but I'm not ready to talk about them yet.

JIM: *What would be the ideal project for Garco to get involved with, if it had unlimited funds — what would you really want to do?*

GARY: I think I'd like to own a foreign country. (Laughter.)

JIM: *Which country?*

GARY: It'd become *my* country, so it wouldn't make a difference.

JIM: *You've worked as an artist for Archie Comics. What was that like?*

GARY: It's strange. They would send me twelve pages one week to draw, the next week they'd send me six, then they'd cut me off for two weeks and I'd have no income. Then they'd bring me back and keep me in money, then they'd stop again.

The Stan Drake solution for simplifying a newspaper strip, from COMIC ART WORKSHOP, Volume II.

THIS IS MY SOLUTION FOR A "NO FRILLS" DAILY STRIP BASED ON THE ORIGINAL DONE MANY YEARS AGO. BASICALLY, WE SIMPLY PULL EVERYTHING UP CLOSER AND IN SO DOING ELIMINATE SMALLER DETAIL WHICH IS NOT ALWAYS NECESSARY.

These days, I'm doing better than ever."

© 1983 Garco Systems

Something all artists need to know: How to show different expressions, from Volume II.

JIM: *Did you enjoy drawing?*
GARY: Of all the drawing I've ever done — and I don't do that much — I like easy drawing, and ARCHIE was the easiest.
JIM: *You worked for Western Comics also. How did that go?*

GARY: Me and the editor at Western didn't get along at all.
DAK: *What did you do over there?*
GARY: I did two stories for TWEETY AND SYLVESTER. But I hated it. They make you draw, like, six times larger than printed size. I didn't enjoy it at all.

JIM: *And you've worked for your father, Sol Brodsky, at Marvel. How was that?*
GARY: He's the hardest person I ever had to work for. He figures, because I'm his son, he's got to make it even *tougher,* so nobody can say, "Well, he's your son." He's not easy. If it was just a work situation, it'd be one thing, but he'll boss me at home too, and at dinner.
JIM: *Would you like to continue doing any more artwork? Or would you rather be an entrepreneur?*
GARY: I'd like to do both, because I can never make too much money — I've never met anyone who could. I'd like to do some coloring books, some easy books, so I have something to do late at night, because I don't need that much sleep.

DAK: *Didn't you say once that you were the only big name in coloring books?*
GARY: No. I'm the *only* name in coloring books. I've done coloring-book work for every company except Playmore, Inc., which I won't do work for, for personal reasons.

DAK: *What characters?*
GARY: Naming off a bunch that I *didn't* do would be a lot easier. I've done almost all the major Marvel characters, some DC characters, MIGHTY MOUSE, BUCK ROGERS —
DAK: *G.I. JOE, right?*

GARY: That's the big one now. I package a lot of books and I'm doing about eleven hundred pages of G.I. JOE. I'm not drawing it all myself, though. Some of them are 128 pages long!
DAK: *That amazes me. They're the Russian novels of coloring books.*

GARY: I just wonder how many green crayons the kid has to use up for those uniforms.

JIM: *What are you doing next with Garco?*
GARY: We're publishing a book on cartooning, on how to draw storyboards. We got a deal to distribute directly through art stores and regular bookstores, and we're co-producing books.

JIM: *How involved are you in putting together the COMIC ART WORKSHOPS? Is it mostly Dick putting the books together with you giving him a free hand?*

GARY: Dick gives me a book that is so well produced, I just hand it to the printer. There's no problem. Nobody else does that. The rest of the books are done in-house.

DAK: *What sorts of things are you co-publishing?*
GARY: We'll be doing a line of books for art stores, and we're going to be doing some regular trade books and how-to books.
JIM: *Do you think Garco will ever get involved in publishing comics?*
GARY: End of April, hopefully.
JIM: *Do you have plans?*

GARY: We're going to begin to put the books together the end of March and start finding our distribution. I don't know when the books will actually be out, and I don't want to mention the names of the artists, because I don't have definite commitments from them. But I do have the capital to publish comics.

DAK: *So there will be a Garco Comics Group soon?*
GARY: Right. That was a secret, but I guess everybody's going to know about it now.

JIM: *I understand you're interested in samurai swords.*
GARY: Martial arts—that's one of my favorite things. Actually, that's my second favorite thing. My first is gambling. After the Financial Depression of '82, I became quite hostile, and I found that it was a great outlet to get my hostilities out.

DAK: *When you say gambling, what type?*
GARY: Any type. Could be business, could be gambling. I like high-risk situations, because my favorite thing in the world is actually winning. I think basically everybody likes that best, they just don't realize it.

JIM: *Tell us more about karate —*
GARY: I used to teach kids, but I found they were impossible to control. Because their mothers were there, I couldn't make them do push-ups and have their mothers yelling at me. So I tried making their mothers do push-ups. It didn't work out. I like fencing with the swords.

DAK: *Do you have a belt?*
GARY: Yes. Brown.
JIM: *Is that your rank or the color of the belt you're wearing?*
GARY: It's my rank. Brown belt is also called third kyu. I work out about two or three hours a day. I love weapons, too.

"I'd like to own a foreign country."

Photo: Jim Salicrup

Weapons tell the history of man. I think the only reason that any country or any civilization survives is because of their weapons and war. It's not due to their benevolence or their attitude, it's due to the fact that they were more superior and won a war. This country exists because we fought better. That's my philosophy behind business, too.

JIM: *How would you run the comic-book companies today, say Marvel or DC?*

GARY: I think it's kind of funny that since **Stan Lee** left, there has not been a new character that was that successful that Marvel produced. The characters that he created years ago are still carrying the company. If I were running Marvel, I would have Stan create some new characters and do some writing, because his stuff is the best and it still carries the company. I haven't seen a new character that has any character at all. Just new drawings, which I don't consider a character. A character means personality — and they don't have them.

JIM: *What about DC?*

GARY: I never see their books. I don't know. Don't tell **Dick.**

DAK: *Your secret is safe with us.*

JIM: *Have you seen many of the comics being done today?*

GARY: I finally read one I liked.It was an issue of MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE. The only comic-book I've looked at in years that I was able to read. Some of them — if you're not a fan and haven't been reading them for years — you can't figure out what's going on. It was the one where the Thing is in the hospital, and every villain comes to beat him up.

JIM: *How many comics have you read lately?*

GARY: I've tried reading a few — if I get through the first three pages, I'll read the whole thing, but I never have — until that book. I think there's too many small figures, small things, and too much copy. And the artwork is way overworked.

JIM: *You would suggest that artists simplify their work?*

GARY: Yeah. It looks like mud. And you can put that in, too.

DAK: *In fencing, have you taken actual lessons?*

GARY: Yeah, but it's not really fencing, it's called kendo. It's the art of fencing with a samurai sword. Fencing is done using a foil; it's European. I hate everything European.

JIM: *Why is that?*

GARY: Because all these snobs make

such a big deal out of it. If they like Europe so much, why don't they go live there? Make this country a better place for us. I hate that, when I go into a shoe store and a salesman says, "These shoes are European" — who cares about that? But I like the Orient. I think their culture has a lot more to admire than Europe.

JIM: *You told me once that you and Sol actually saw a UFO.*

GARY: Yeah. I was driving a car from California to Vegas. I met my parents out there and was going to do some gambling. I saw a UFO right in front of the car. It looked like a big silver cigar, just hanging up there. I didn't want to say, "Hey, look at that," because I know everytime I say that, things disappear and everybody thinks I'm an idio· So I just let it go. And when the thing finally disappeared, I asked my father, "Did you see that?" and he said "Yeah." He was afraid to say anything, too, for the same reason!

DAK: *Getting back to Garco, what else is coming up?*

GARY: HOW TO WRITE FOR COMICS. It's done with a lot of interviews with writers, telling how they write.

DAK: *Who's doing the interviews?*

GARY: Somebody named **Neil Hansen.** He's got all the interviews on tape, and now it's just a matter of transcribing them and getting the art and cover and the type, doing the layouts, getting it printed, and getting the ads ready.

I'm also putting a book together on perspective for the artist, which is for the general art market. **Sal Amendola** is doing that one. It's a co-publishing venture. We also have a mail-order merchandising house. We market all the products that are available on the comics direct-sales market for less money than everybody else.

DAK: *I've seen your ads in COMICS SCENE and all over the place. Not to mention COMICS INTERVIEW.*

GARY: There are a couple other things my company is doing that I don't know much about. We're doing a new version of THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS. My partner, **Brian Moore,** is in charge of the art. We're both partners in the company and we sort of split up who does what. We have a house and a fish tank full of piranha.

DAK: *Do you ever throw anything in there and watch them eat it?*

GARY: Yeah, rats.

DAK: *What happens?*

GARY: They eat them.

DAK: *How long does it take?*

GARY: It takes longer and longer as their numbers decrease.

DAK: *Isn't that sort of your view of the world? You said you think countries exist by war, and that means one country devours another.*

GARY: Actually, it must be, considering I have piranha. We also have other kinds of poisonous fish, some salt water fish.

JIM: *What made you get these fish?*

GARY: We wanted to have some entertainment during the day. Whenever things get a little slow, we pick up a goldfish.

JIM: *Tell us about Brian.*

DAK: *Yeah, where did he come from?*

GARY: During the Financial Depression of '82, when I was trying to rebuild my business, he asked if he could be a partner. I said he had to be crazy. If you want to be a partner, I said, you've got to be prepared to lose two hundred dollars a week.

JIM: *You never told me any of this stuff when you asked me to be your partner!*

GARY: Well, it paid off for him. He's got faith in me and the company. Together, we brought it back bigger than it ever was.

DAK: *What was he doing before he came in with you?*

GARY: He was Vice-President at an audio-visual company, producing corporate shows. He worked on the Chrysler and Allied Chemical accounts. I wouldn't go into partnership with a fool.

DAK: *And he left all that to go in with Garco?*

GARY: He wanted to go out on his own, too. I've known him since before we could talk. It's like two friends against what's out there. It makes it interesting and profitable. We don't have anybody to answer to and we have a lot of laughs when we work together.

"I guess I'm the only real guy who can say I have a superhero named after me."

GENE SIMMONS

Marty Herzog first introduced me to Gene Simmons during a 1977 Kiss tour of Toronto. The three of us (and Simmons' beefy bodyguard) ended up paying an unscheduled Sunday afternoon visit to Ron VanLeeuwen's Silver Snail comics shop, which Ron (grumbling about rock stars) opened as a favor. We browsed the racks and talked about current comics until Gene's "keeper" told him he was due backstage for make-up and dragged him off to get ready for the big outdoor Kiss concert.

To give you an idea how into comics Simmons was at the time, no sooner did Marty introduce me by name, that Gene rattled off a complete list of my scripting credits at three different comic-book companies, and accosted me for acknowledging Blue Oyster Cult in print rather than Kiss. This was in the days, of course, before the Marvel KISS comics became a reality.

Recently, the rock group Kiss was in Toronto again, on tour, and Marty Herzog thought it would be a good idea to talk with demon Gene for COMICS INTERVIEW. After spending a day and

GENE SIMMONS

"I really didn't *read* comic books

Gene. Ace, Stan Lee, Paul and Peter.

night at home in bed, suffering from a severe cold and waiting by the phone as Polygram publicist Karen Gordon hectically scheduled, confirmed and then cancelled interview arrangements on the day of the concert, Marty finally met Karen and Gene the next day for lunch at Toronto's Four Seasons, where he conducted the following exclusive interview about Kiss and comics . . .

— DAK

MARTY HERZOG: *How does it feel, being a Marvel superhero as well as a rock superstar with Kiss?*

GENE SIMMONS: You know, I really thought about this for quite a while. Having those two Marvel books out about me, I guess I'm the only real guy who can say that I have a superhero named after me. Because **Gene Simmons** in the book flew and breathed fire, and actually faced off against Doctor Doom. (Laughter.) And I did send my boots flying after Mephisto — who else can say that? You know, those KISS books were big successes, and I'm very proud of it. We didn't have more books because of the business side of it.

MARTY: *You know Marv Wolfman, don't you?*

GENE: Not Biblically. When I was, oh probably around fourteen, Marvin and I were both living in Queens, in New York City, and we were both publishing different fanzines. I was publishing COSMOS, which merged with another fanzine, STILETTO, to become COSMOS- STILETTO. Marv was publishing TALES OF SUSPENSE and another one, TERROR OF THE WOLFMAN. Something like that, purely stripzines. How do you like all that fan jargon — fandom, genzine.

MARTY: *Karen likes the FANTASTIC FOUR.*

GENE: Who do you like, Sue Storm?

KAREN GORDON: Me, I can't remember the actual characters. I was a SUPERMAN girl, myself.

GENE: Ugh! Which one, the **Curt Swan** version?

KAREN: The **Curt Swan** version?

MARTY: *You're getting pretty deep for her, there.*

GENE: I guess you read ARCHIE.

KAREN: Sure, I read ARCHIE.

GENE: Phooey,' feh. PATSY AND HEDY were much better, didn't you think?

MARTY: *About Marv Wolfman . . .*

GENE: Well, the concept was for us to get together and publish another mergerzine. We didn't know what it was going to be. So he came over to my house and we met and I thought, what a strange sort of moniker, "Wolfman." And then I thought, why not, if you're going to be dealing with that sort of *genre?* He looked sort of Clark Kentish. A cross between Clark and Herbie Popnecker. We talked and had a pleasant afternoon. I had my Gestetner mimeograph machine in the middle of the room.

MARTY: *Really?*

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Gene Simmons (or *is* it really?)
Occupation: Rockstar
Born: 25 August 1949 in Israel
Residence: Anywhere he hangs his costume.
Credits: Fanzines: COSMOS-STILETTO; Record Albums: KISS ALIVE, DESTROYER, ROCK AND ROLL OVER, etc.
Prize Possession: 50 hours of Looney-Tunes on videotape.

GENE: Oh, yeah. That's all I did. I never hung out on street corners. There was girls and magazines and that was all, in that order. Anyway, I don't know what became of the fanzine. Marv and I sort of lost touch.

MARTY: *And you knew Stephen King, too, didn't you? Marv published one of Stephen King's first stories in a fanzine . . .*

GENE: No, we never met. In fact, the first I ever heard of him is when people started calling me up and telling me that he was talking about me in FIRESTARTER, one of his books. I remember getting encouragement back then from **Jack Gaughan,** the science fiction artist for AMAZING STORIES and IF. When I was, like, fifteen, the University of Wisconsin — which has a big science-fiction library — contacted me and said, "We've heard a lot about your collection and we'd like to put it in a time capsule or something." I think they thought I was older. So I did — I sent them every issue I ever published.

MARTY: *That's incredible. So at one point in your life, comics were very big.*

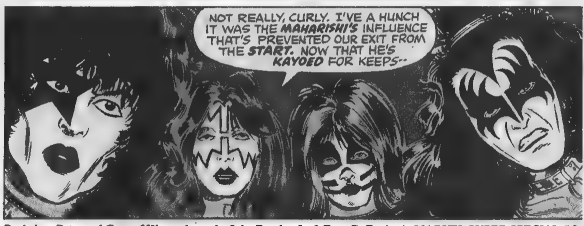
GENE: Still are. I still enjoy them. Every CONAN is important. Some of the new FANTASTIC FOURs are very good. **John Byrne** is very good. I miss the old SILVER SURFER.

MARTY: *What was it that first attracted you to comics?*

GENE: Well, I never, ever, avidly read comics for the stories or the art, in the beginning. First of all, I was born and raised in a different country, Israel. When I was nine I came to the United States, and read comics because the colors and pictures were interesting, and the people dressed funny. The first comic book I picked up was Congo Bill in Congorilla, a back-up feature in SUPERBOY, the **Kirby** version. Did you know that **Kirby** drew a couple of the SUPERBOYs? I later picked

until I saw SPIDER-MAN #1."

© 1978 Kiss


NOT REALLY, CURLY. I'VE A HUNCH IT WAS THE MAHARISHI'S INFLUENCE THAT'S PREVENTED OUR EXIT FROM THE START. NOW THAT HE'S KAYOED FOR KEEPS--

Paul, Ace, Peter and Gene of Kiss as drawn by John Romita, Jr. & Tony DeZuniga in MARVEL SUPER SPECIAL #5.

up those issues. And I really wasn't very interested. Everybody was sort of plastic — peachy-keen middle-class America, Anglo-Saxon, white and Protestant. Nobody lived like that in New York. So it was totally fabricated. I didn't believe in it. So, I really didn't *read* comic books until I saw SPIDER-MAN #1, with Spider-Man hanging upside-down and the Fantastic Four pointing up towards him. Wasn't that SPIDER-MAN #1?

MARTY: *I think so.*

GENE: And I never even heard of AMAZING ADULT FANTASY #15 — the last issue, that features the first Spider-Man story, with the cover drawn by **Kirby** because they didn't trust **Ditko's** style to sell.

MARTY: *You're really into the lore of it.*

GENE: The Peter Lorre.

MARTY: *Did you ever have any aspirations of becoming a writer or an artist?*

GENE: Oh, sure. I wanted to be **Jack Kirby.** (Laughter.) Early **Jack Kirby.** In fact, when we were first having conversations with Marvel about doing the KISS comic book, **Kirby** was going to do it. But he was on his way out from Marvel; one thing led to another, and he ended up not doing it. Ironically enough, when the guy who did do it, **Alan Weiss,** first walked into the office, I said, "Scarpcon. 1968. You got off on the 7th floor and I said to you, 'You drew the BLUE BEETLE fan artwork that appeared in the letter column.' And he just *died,* because that was his first piece of published art. He suggested a new costume for the Blue Beetle to Charlton. I remember things like that. I don't know why. I'm sure if I got onto a couch a shrink could tell me what all these things mean.

MARTY: *So you wanted to be an artist?*

GENE: Yeah, I wanted to be **Jack Kirby,** and before **Stan Lee** started doing too many books, I wanted to be **Stan Lee,** too. My true loves were the **Kirby-Ditko-Lee** fantasy stories . . .

MARTY: *"Fin Fang Foom" . . .*

GENE: Not that one, so much as the one with the little old man who made a puppet, and it came to life, and he's about to die, and all of a sudden the puppet saves him, and the police come and they can't explain it, and there's sort of a **Ditko** character with one hand on his hip and taking off his hat with the other hand and scratching his head — and over in the corner, looking back over his shoulder, looking back into our point of view, is the smiling puppet. It really touched me. It just grabbed me.

MARTY: *Those were great little short stories.*

GENE: They're the best, those stories of the "twilight zone." And the great "invasion" stories, too. There was one, "I Am Doomed," in which this creature, sort of a **Ditko** thing — "Nothing can stop me, I am the biggest thing, nothing can stop me"— keeps growing and growing. One foot crushes a mountain, and all of a sudden he grows bigger than the planet. "Nothing can stop me! There is no God! There is only doom!" And, all of a sudden, it starts raining. And the water doesn't stop. And he says, "This is impossible!" And he starts drowning. And this is the end, "This is my doom . . ." Then, he dies. And, in the last panel, the scientist says to his helper, "Did you wash off that Petri dish?"

Simmons squares off against Dr. Doom in MARVEL SUPER SPECIAL #1.

DO NOT WASTE THE EFFORT, DEMON.
THE ENTIRE LENGTH OF DR. DOOM'S ARMOR IS ELECTRIFIED!
YOUR FIRST BLOW WILL BE YOUR LAST!
KRAK
AAARGH

© 1977 Kiss/MCG

"Comics will never be appreciated by grown-ups.

MARTY: *I remember that one. Now that you mention these things, they come back.*

GENE: They're great. The **Don Heck** school of artwork, I was never a fan of, though. Too grown-up, too well-scrubbed, everybody had too-angular, white sort of features. Nobody looked real.

MARTY: *It's funny you should mention the impact comics had on you when you came here from Israel. When my wife first emigrated from Israel, she also started reading through comic books.*

GENE: When I became a sixth-grade school-teacher, which I was, for a short time —

MARTY: *My wife's now a fifth-grade school-teacher!*

GENE (Hums TWILIGHT ZONE theme. Laughter from both.): What sign is she, man? When was she born?

MARTY: *September 13, 1950.*

GENE: Virgo. Me, too. I really don't know much about astrology. I'm still trying to find the "horror" in horoscopes.

MARTY: *But you taught school?*

GENE: Yeah, sixth grade. I'd bring in SPIDER-MAN and assign it as homework. "I want you to write a synopsis of the story. And tomorrow you'll be quizzed on it. I may ask you what any word means. That's your homework." And the school would just be on my ass all the time about it.

MARTY: *Have you noticed, in the time since you were a kid, not everyone in comics is white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, anymore? Most recently Magneto has been revealed as being Jewish. (Laughter.)*

GENE: It used to be reverse racism. Because Jews had such a big hand in the press and media, there would be no Jewish characters.

MARTY: *It really was strange, though, since most comic-book companies were originally owned by Jewish families. Stan Lee is Jewish — Stan Leiber. And so is Jack Kirby, who was actually Jack Kurtzberg, I think. Yet they never depicted anybody as being Jewish.*

GENE: You can't. Historically, when you're subjugated and all that, and you can't make in-roads into politics or power or anything — then you try to get into bases of power. Money and media. That's all there is. But now I think everybody's getting a little more realistic about life.

MARTY: *How do you feel about comics as a learning medium — are they beneficial?*

GENE: Oh, sure. There's no doubt in my mind. I know that fans, real comic-book fans, try hard to push comic books to

AND IF YOU DO— YOU'LL FIND ME JUST AS CONTENTIOUS!
I RELISH MY NEW POWERS— I WANT TO SAVOR IT— WIELD IT AT MY WHIM!
BETTER BY FAR TO DOMINATE ON EARTH THAN TO SERVE IN HELL!!

Gerber put the words in Gene's mouth.

grow up and really be appreciated by the adult world. But comic books will never be appreciated by the masses, by grown-ups, because they deal with juvenile subject matter — you know, Peter Parker not getting the girl, while Flash Thompson always does, and all that stuff. I think it's really important. People who have gone through life to the point where they're earning a living, they've gotten past the point where they really need help. The people who really need moral help are people going through pubescence and who aren't sure of themselves, and need to be able to identify with characters.

Like, when I started reading SPIDER-MAN, there was Flash going down to the mail to hang out with Gwen. I could look at my comic books and say to myself, look what I got here at home! I've got the world . . . It makes being a bookworm sort of cool. And then when Flash, at the end, was made out to be a buffoon —

MARTY: *Now Peter Parker always gets the girls.*

GENE: He's growing up. Times change.

MARTY: *But you don't look upon comics, then, as purely entertainment, purely waste?*

GENE: Oh, no. They are really lessons in life . . . in disposable form. They're really the only folk art that exists. I see rock'n'roll and comic books as going very hand-in-hand. There's no great depth to them, there's no lasting value to them except that they reflect what goes on right now — the pervading values, the language, the dress. Newspapers only report events, a war here, a war there. That's not the point. The point is the war is the result of something, all the events leading up to it. Like the feeling people had, even before Nixon was caught, that they were unhappy. So they were having demonstrations and everything, and you'd see Peter Parker marching and doing all that stuff. And in rock'n'roll, you'd hear the "Eve of Destruction."

MARTY: *So comics are useful as mirrors of the times . . .*

GENE: Yes, especially in the Marvel books, and now in the DC books.

MARTY: *Getting back to your years as a fan, earlier in your life, what writers did you—*

GENE: There was *only* **Stan Lee,** at that point. I do remember though . . . gee, I could use some more tea . . . I do remember, though, **Denny O'Neil** when he did those GREEN LANTERN stories with **Neal Adams.** Those were exceptional.

WAITRESS: Would you like some more tea?

MARTY: *Do we have time?*

GENE: I know nothing. When they want me, they'll get me.

MARTY: *How does it feel to have a secret identity?*

GENE: The best! I do have a secret and we protect it. It's getting harder and harder.

MARTY: *I don't believe that any photos have ever been published of your face without make-up . . .*

GENE: I don't think so. It's interesting to sometimes go to clubs, or concerts or movies, and get into conversations with people. There is a one-on-one sort of relationship. You're just who you are. Once they ask you *what* you are or what it is you do— then there is a totally different sort of relationship.

MARTY: *The attitude changes?*

GENE: Oh, completely. "Can I have your autograph?" And even though I don't look the way I do on stage, at the same time I sure don't look like a plumber! There's a certain sense that this guy's no longer a teacher.

MARTY: *Good point.*

GENE: So if **Kiss** is in town, they figure it out right away.

MARTY: *What do you do when you're not recording or touring with Kiss?*

GENE: Chase girls. Very important. It's a dirty job, but somebody's got to do it . . .

MARTY: *. . . so you volunteered. What else are you interested in, other than the group and girls?*

GENE: Movies. The business of. In five years you'll say, "Ah, *that's* what you meant!"

MARTY: *I'll put that in bold. IN FIVE YEARS, GENE SIMMONS IS GOING TO . . .*

GENE: For me to say that dilutes whatever I'm doing now. If you're at a party and you start talking about your next party, it dilutes the party you're at now.

© 1977 Kiss

They deal with juvenile subject matter."

"I wanted to be Jack Kirby. Stan Lee, too."

© 1977 KISS

YOU PLUCKED US FROM DIMENSIONAL SPACE-- BROUGHT US HERE INTENTIONALLY!
WHY??
AND WHY THE ELABORATE CHARADE--THE ENTICEMENTS TO STAY--
--WHEN YOUR POWER IN THESE DEPTHS IS ABSOLUTE?
COME NOW, DEMON-- EVEN YOU CANNOT ACCEPT SUCH SIMPLISTIC LOGIC!
WHY DISPATCH YOUR "PETS" TO ATTACK ME--IF YOU ENTERTAIN NO HOPE OF VICTORY?

Gene's boots in "hot" pursuit of Mephisto (SUPER SPECIAL #1).

MARTY: *But somehow you will be . . .*

GENE: . . . in the movies, as they say. Could have been this year. But I decided the group was more important. I'm really going to make sure the group is going to last its entire lifetime, however long that is going to be. And there are a lot of things still to do . . . like **Kiss World.** We'll wait a little while for the group to get bigger, again, and then we'll have **Kiss World.** A series of them, at least.

MARTY: *I understand the show last night was incredibly visual.*

GENE: There's some fire-breathing and blood-spitting into the air and we give birth on stage and there's some fire balls that go thirty feet up into the air. And it rains fire and also some rockets take off on stage, and the stage looks like a tank sixty feet wide. You actually feel it in your chest when the tank moves. And then the drum riser, which is on top of the tank, goes forward, moves left and right, and actually fires like a real tank. And blows up the sound system!

MARTY: *And on top of that is music.*

GENE: That's the visual side and then we provide the soundtrack. That's because the people who go to see bands live usually get to hear the band but don't get the visuals. We believe that when you're at home with the album, you've got the soundtrack. Come see it live, and see the movie. It's the eighth or ninth version of the Kiss tours. I mean there have been other tours where hydraulic rigs were used to fly us up fifty feet into the air at six feet a second. And just anything you can imagine that money can buy, we're going to do.

MARTY: *It sounds like comics had a lot of influence on your act . . .*

GENE: Oh, sure! You know, I started doing a hand signal like this in live concerts that everyone is now doing. I didn't even know what it meant. Then I found out it means, "I Love You," in sign language. And, of course, the idiots in the Bible-belt thought that it was devil worship stuff. But that's okay. I'm sure being Jewish works right in along with that sort of thinking. Wear the horns, and all of that. And the reason they believe that is because they've got little dicks. (Laughter.) Then I found out that subconsciously, I must have been doing Dr. Strange.

MARTY: *Did the concept of Kiss come from comic books?*

GENE: No. Conceptually, it didn't. That was all subconscious. We were going to do a straight sort of rock'n'roll band fashioned after **Slade** and **Alice Cooper, Deep Purple,** anybody, in terms of influence who was doing anything spectacular. And then we wanted to look different. Make-up seemed to be one way to do it, and costumes the other. But, it wasn't comic books, initially. My first reference point was **Lon Chaney, Sr.** in PHANTOM OF THE OPERA. Especially that look when his mask is torn off! My movements on stage are pure **Harryhausen.** Anybody who studies stop-motion animation knows that I studied **Ray Harryhausen** for years. The way I move is the way Harryhausen animates his figures. All of them, tigers, saber-toothed tigers, move like lizards. What they do is, first push their haunches up, their head sticks up, and the head moves before the body. All that stuff. Animals don't move like that — only lizards. And I didn't even know it, at first, until I'd studied myself on film via TV shows, or whatever. It's **Harryhausen,** if he were animating me.

MARTY: *Again, subconsciously?*

GENE: It's like when you watch basketball, when you go out, you're probably going to dribble like **Wilt Chamberlain,** and do jump-shots just like **Doctor J** or whoever it is . . . or when you watch **Travolta** disco-dancing, then when you go out you are going to dance like him and push up your right fist and . . .

MARTY: *You are. I'm not. Were any of the other band members into comic books?*

GENE: No. They hate comic books. Paul hates cartoons. But, Eric, our drummer, likes them. Not comic books or superheroes but cartoons. So, in the dressing rooms, when we're starting to get made up, he and I do entire pieces of dialogue back and forth. Cartoons, Three Stooges, and everything else. And Paul picks up on it. He has never seen the cartoons. He does entire bits of dialogue, but he doesn't know what they come from and, at the end, he says, "Aw, I hate cartoons!"

MARTY: *So the comic-book influence on Kiss wasn't conscious?*

GENE: No. But, after awhile it made all the sense in the world. In fact, as I understand it, CBS has an option for the FANTASTIC FOUR as a movie. And **Stan Lee** knows I would love to play the Thing, anytime, anywhere . . .

MARTY: *Is your life good right now?*

GENE: Yeah! It always is. Now, especially.

MARTY: *What is the future of Kiss and the future of Gene Simmons?*

GENE: We're going to tour, make records, and put on the best shows in the world.

LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

FIRST IS FIRST

Dear David:

Everybody here at First was very impressed with your premiere issue of COMICS INTERVIEW. Wishing you the best of luck with the magazine!

Rick Oliver
Associate Editor
First Comics, Inc.
1014 Davis Street
Evanston, Illinois 60201

We welcome your advertising, Rick, and appreciate your support! Here's wishing you folks at First all the best. Keep those comics coming!

— DAK

"SOUP-TO-NUTS"

Dear David:

Well, the first issue of DAK's COMICS INTERVIEW is out (for your demographics, I picked it up at a convention in Washington DC) and it is looking very good. I must admit that my reaction, when I first saw the ads, was much the same as yours was when **Jim Salicrup** suggested the all-interview format; but on reading the magazine, I find the idea pleasant, informative, nowhere near as repetitive as one might think, and to a certain extent, even necessary.

INTERVIEW's strength (one of them, anyway) is that the reader knows exactly what he or she is going to find inside. Other magazines — and this is not meant as a pronouncement against any of them, merely an observation — may or may not have, in a given issue, an interview or letters page or other feature. Sometimes that absence can be an irritation. Another strength of your magazine is, I think, the low-key, more objective level of questioning that you use; it does not seem to lead the interviewee into over emotionalism and allows more straight, solid information to come through. Negative critics of the magazine will possibly call that interview style "bland," but for my money it suits your stated editorial goal better than a water-muddying style.

Which is not to say that what comes out of the mouths of the people being interviewed is "bland," either. I especially enjoyed **Steve Gerber**'s comments on Saturday morning animation and television in general. I also very much appreciate being able to hear from people who in all likelihood would not be interviewed — for lack of some ill-defined "superstardom" — anywhere else — people like **Jim Novak** and **Jim Galton.** The lineup of professions interviewed on your contents page reminds me of a panel I once attended at a major science-fiction convention. Titled "The Biography of a Book," the panelists consisted of an author, an agent, an editor, a publisher, a book buyer and finally, a critic. I had never seen such a "soup-to-nuts" line-up before, and it was a fascinating panel. INTERVIEW promises similar coverage and fascination.

It's a heck of a time to launch a new magazine, and I think you've got a strong entry in the race. Best of fortune!

Richard Pini
WaRP Graphics
2 Reno Road
Poughkeepsie, New York 12603

Thanks for the nice letter, Richard — and for taking time out from your work as part of the ELFQUEST team to share your enthusiasm. It's always a pleasure to get a kind word from a fellow professional!

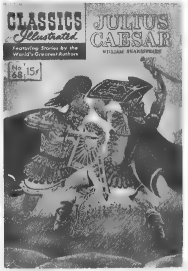
— DAK

GREAT DOG STORIES

Dear DAK:

Congratulations on your premiere issue. Of particular excellence was the interview with "Fan on the Street" **Bill Chadwick.**

I'd just like to add, *re* CHIP'N'DALE comics, that a considerable part of their charm is in the benevolent sense of life embodied by those mischievous "munks" and underlying the simple, innocent stories. A recurring theme is the boys' attempts to live in harmony with their woodland neighbors and with the Disney "guest stars" (Pluto, Donald Duck, etc.) who are always dropping in on them. The diminutive but cheeky heroes constantly demonstrate great ingenuity and Odyssean cunning in outwitting the Big Bad Wolf, Br'er Fox, and the other predators of the birds who live by force and fraud. Without being didactic in a heavyhanded, public-service-announcement manner, the stories teach, in an amusing, understanding way, such values as being one's own best friend, and mutual co-operation among free beings. Plus, the little critters are so goshdarn cute you just want to tickle their bellies and feed them full of nuts.



Finally, for the historical record — *re* comic books of my formative years — mention must be made of CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED, a series that opened up a whole world of literature to this member of the TV Generation. Besides the intellect-expanding virtues of the stories, the biographies of the authors, and the prose features such as "Great Moments in History" and "Great Dog Stories," CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED had lots of neat violence . . . scenes of lethal swordplay, spearings, knifings, and battlefield carnage far beyond the pretty zap!-pow! mayhem-ballets in BATMAN and SUPERMAN. (Only DICK TRACY, with the actual depiction of spent bullets tumbling from exit-wounds, came close to THE ILIAD.) One example that comes to fond memory is the CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED version of **Emile Zola's** THE DOWNFALL that I liked for its stirring blood-and-thunder scenes of Franco-Prussian slaughter until I learned from **Ayn Rand** what a creep **Zola** was. Great literature, those CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED.

Bill Chadwick
441 West 49th Street
Apt. #12
New York, NY 10019

EXCELSIOR

Dear David Anthony,

Just wanna thank you for the autographed copy of COMICS INTERVIEW. I read it from cover to cover and thought it was great. Well, as great as any mag can be that doesn't have an article about my favorite "presenter" between its cataclysmic covers!

The layouts and illos were first rate, and your choice of interviewees (except for one previously-mentioned omission) was right on target. My own favorite was the dialogue with Jolly **Jim Galton,** my charismatic confrere who has been doing such a sensational job of bringing mighty Marvel to even greater heights of glory and goofiness.

I also got a big kick out of Sturdy **Steve Gerber**'s write-up, even if his photo did make him look like the creature from the black lagoon. It's great to learn that there are still some idealistic iconoclasts who proudly prefer working in comics to slaving in tv or films. Take care of yourself, Gerby — you're the last of a vanishing breed!

That's it for now, DAK. If I write any more, you'll haveta put a title atop this piece and call it an article! Keep the faith — and keep the issues coming.

Excelsior!

Stan Lee
Marvel Productions Ltd.
4610 Van Nuys Blvd.
Sherman Oaks, CA 91403

Sneaky devil that I am, I've had a "Stan Lee Goes Hollywood" interview in mind from the very start — and now that you've snapped at the bait, Stan-Baby, I'm gonna hold you to it!

— DAK

MISS HULK

Dear DAK:

Bon jour de Paris! Just got back from the Marche aux Puces (French for flea market) and what should be in the mailbox but an envelope from you containing a letter and the first issue of COMICS INTERVIEW. Amazing — at long last it's a "real magazine"! Looks great! *Tres bien, mon ami* (that's French again for "very well, my friend" — they speak a lot of French over here)!

Have not as yet read it in this, the official form, foregoing that pleasure until I have satisfied myself with admiring its looks. I was glad to read that response has been good. From what little I know of the second issue, it should do even better than the first.

I think you have a very solid product that more than fills the gap that has existed in the field. And I am really happy to see that your professionalism has shown through so well in every aspect of this carefully-designed and broadly-informative journal.

I have been extremely busy in the fabulous City of Light and its environs. One of the passions the French have is comics! There is such a huge variety available that it is almost virtually indescribable! Since my main interest is seeing what the French editions of the various American products are like, I have been concentrating more on searching them out. But that is not to say that I've neglected the domestic publications. The French very much love Westerns — I counted over forty different titles in various formats at one store, alone! And there are lots of science-fiction, detective, super-hero, adventure, war — and more — titles than you can shake the proverbial stick at.

Among things that I have bought are a snazzy hardcover edition of BLADE RUNNER which has Archie's and Al's names on the cover, the French edition of a TARZAN comic that **Mark Evanier**

talked about, an edition of STRANGE, *Journal de Spider-Man en Couleurs*, that has a drawing of **Stan Lee** on the cover. Inside are the Cat and Hela stories from his book on the super-hero women. Also got a nicely printed issue of MISS HULK (as the She-Hulk is known over here) that has two stories you did featuring the Blob creature and the Seeker. And I picked up a bunch of other things, including a gross comic-book filled with *pastiches*. This last is definitely an item that must be seen to be believed.

And the TV station has a prime-time program that appears every week about comics and rock. Saw everything from mainstream American and European comics to the lesser known things such as **Mike Friedrich**'s QUACK! There are even videocassettes available of the Marvel comic cartoon adventures! Am taking lots of pictures, so you'll have a pretty good idea of what a wealth of popular entertainment there is over here.

Again, congratulations on your first issue! *Au revoir!*

"Beastly Z from fabulous Paree"
D. Jon Zimmerman
Malakoff, France

While you're having a high time in Paris we're devoting days, nights and weekends to the magazine. Hurry up and get back here! We've got more work than it's humanly possible to handle, Z — and we're saving it all for you.

If those pictures are good, maybe we can publish a photo feature on comics in France, along with your commentary.

— DAK

THE PLOT THICKENS

Dear DAK:

There is more to the history of the celebrated Chaykin/Abel Murder Mystery than **Terry Austin** remembers. Take a good look at the page which **Brent Anderson** drew, Terry inked, and I wrote for the 1981 SPIRIT "jam" and you will find a newspaper proclaiming that Lady Luck has been called in on the Chaykin/Abel case. However, in this case Terry didn't write the headline, I did. (But, no, I *didn't* put Popeye anywhere.).

Best wishes on COMICS INTERVIEW.

Peter Sanderson
New York City

UNRELENTING BROWBEATING

Dear David:

Bravo — COMICS INTERVIEW is a thoroughly professional, entertaining publication. In my opinion, it's the best thing to happen to comics journalism since the COMICS JOURNAL, and a heck of a lot more fun.

The main reason I've always read the JOURNAL was for its interviews, but their editors' unrelenting browbeating of mainstream comics pros and fans leaves me very cold. Your professional, up perspective on the medium is much more my style.

Leave it to a pro to make the magazine *LOOK* professional as well. I applaud everything from its size (naturally!) to its logo (great job, **Jim Novak**), to its continuing sections. Very damn clever, and again, very entertaining. Layout is exceptional, with no wasted space but no big blocks of grey type, either. I even love the little word balloon that denotes the end of each piece. Geez, you really thought out this publication.

If I weren't already a subscriber, I'd certainly subscribe now!

I also liked your choice of initial interviews, particularly (to me) mystery man **Jim Galton**. I'd love to see you try to nail down **Jenette Kahn** for one, now-- DC's never been hotter, in my opinion, and I think she'd have a lot of interesting things to say about it.

David, I've always wanted to see an entire magazine devoted to interviews; I've even thought of doing one myself. But you've done everything I'd do and better. I applaud your new publication and wish you years of success with it. I'll certainly stick around for the ride.

Jeff Gelb
1915 Havemeyer Ln.
Redondo Beach, CA 90278

CHIC CHATS

Dear David,

Thanks for complimentary copy of first issue.

Very impressed. Like your editorial approach and concept. Stay with it and best of luck!

Chic Stone
Millbrook, AL

A REAL PLUS

Dear David,

I received my first issue of COMICS INTERVIEW today via Westfield Comics and I must say I am very impressed!

The size of the book is very nice, along with the production of the book's contents. I've been waiting for a magazine like this for quite a while. It's overdue.

I really like the way the interviews are broken down into the different branches of the comic-book industry. (Writer, artist, etc.) This is a real plus.

The interview with Slifer and Giffen was very informative. I'm looking forward to the future progress of THE OMEGA MEN as far as character studies.

I read and collect mainly the super-hero types of comics with a few war and westerns sprinkled in. As a youngster, I read everything from ARCHIE to DR. STRANGE, but I also read a lot of the Whitman comics. The interview with **Mike Teitelbaum** was without a doubt the most interesting of all the interviews. It told me stuff that I didn't know and renewed my interest in the Whitman line (Western).

Keep it up, I'm signing on for the full fifteen rounds.

Stephen Scott Beau Smith
110 Lewis Ave.
Apt. #7
Barboursville, WV 25504

We're not only going to keep it up, Beau — we're going to step it up... COMICS INTERVIEW goes to a monthly schedule, starting next issue!

— DAK

DATING, ANYONE?

David:

I liked the first issue quite a bit — especially the **Teitelbaum** interview. How about a follow-up. Now that the east-coast Western Publishing plant has closed up? Is Mike still with them?

One criticism, and one criticism only: How about dating the interviews like 'most everone else does? There were *many* times I wondered just when you'd talked with these people — some of whom may have been talking about secret projects that have now been announced, etc. It should be a simple thing to add — even "early November," or whatever, would be fine. Basically, if you find it valuable to tell the reader *where* the conversation took place, wouldn't it also be worthwhile to tell us *when*?

Jim Bahler
115 N. Palm St.
Janesville, WI 53545

As of this writing (early February) Mike is still with Western. Maybe he'll even drop us a note here and give us The Last Word on what's happening at Western.

On the subject of dating the interviews, I'll fall back on the tried-and-true method I've used so many times while writing Marvel letters pages — what do the rest of you out there think? If enough of you folks think it's important, I'll certainly see that it's done. What do you say?

— DAK

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_Ka-Zar
_King Conan
_Marvel Fanfare
_Marvel Tales
_Marvel Team-Up
_Micronauts
_Moon Knight
_New Mutants
_Peter Parker, Spect. Spider-Man
_Power Man/Iron Fist
_Red Sonja
_Rom
_Star Wars
_The Thing
_Thor
_U.S. 1
_Warlock
_What If?
_X-Men
_Any One Shot
_Any #1
_Any Limited Series
_Annuals

MARVEL MAGAZINES
_Analog
_Bizarre Adventures
_Epic
_Isaac Asimov
_Marvel paperback series
_Marvel Graphic Novel
_Marvel Super Special
_Savage Sword

WARRENS
_Creepy
_Eerie
_Famous Monsters
_Vampirella
_One Shots
_Annuals

DC COMICS
_Action
_All-Star Squadron
_Amethyst
_Arak
_Arion
_Batman
_Batman/Outsiders
_Blackhawk
_Camelot 3000
_Captain Carrot
_DC Comics Presents
_Detective
_Flash
_Fury of Firestorm
_G.I. Combat
_Green Arrow
_Green Lantern
_House of Mystery
_Jonah Hex
_Justice League
_Legion of Super-Heroes
_New Teen Titans
_Night Force
_Omega Men
_Ronin
_Saga of Swamp Thing
_Sgt. Rock
_Superboy
_Supergirl
_Superman
_Warlord
_Wonder Woman
_World's Finest
_Adventure Digest
_Best of DC Digest
_Any One Shot
_Any #1
_Any Miniseries
_Annuals

FAN MAGAZINES
_Amazing Heroes
_Blake 7
_Comic Fandom's Feature
_Comics Feature
_Comic Informer
_Comics Journal
_Comic Reader
_Comics Scene
_D.C. Index
_Dr. Who British paperbacks
_Dr. Who monthlies (British)
_Enterprise Incidents
_Fanfare
_Fantastic Exploits
_Fantasy Empire
_Marvel Index
_Panels
_Prevue
_RBCC
_Video Gaming Illustrated

PACIFIC COMICS
_Alien Worlds
_Capt. Victory
_Elric
_Groo, the Wanderer
_Ms. Mystic
_Pacific Presents
_Silver Star
_Star Slayer (#1-6)
_Twisted Tales

ECLIPSE COMICS
_Destroyer Duck
_DNAgents
_John Law (one-shot)
_Ms. Tree
_Sabre
_Scorpio Rose

FIRST COMICS
_American Flagg
_E-Man
_Jon Sable
_Starslayer (#7on)
_Warp
_Any #1

ALTERNATIVE COMICS
_Adventure Illustrated
_Alternate Existence
_Cerebus
_Eclipse
_Elfquest
_Fantaco Chronicles
_Fantasy Illustrated
_Fantasy Images
_First Kingdom
_Gates of Eden
_Hembeck
_Hugo
_JCP Features (Thunder Agents)
_Justice Machine
_Ken Pierce Reprints
_Love & Rockets
_Nell the Horse
_Nexus
_Spirit
_Star Rider & The Peace Machine
_Steve Canyon

SPECIAL EFFECTS MAGAZINES
_Amazing Cinema
_American Cinematographer
_Cinefantastique
_Cinefex
_Cinema (British)
_Cinemagic
_Fangoria
_Fantastic Films
_Fantasy Modelling
_Starburst (British)
_Starlog
_Starlog Guidebooks

RED CIRCLE COMICS
_The Fly
_Mighty Crusaders
_If all

ARCHIE COMICS
_If all
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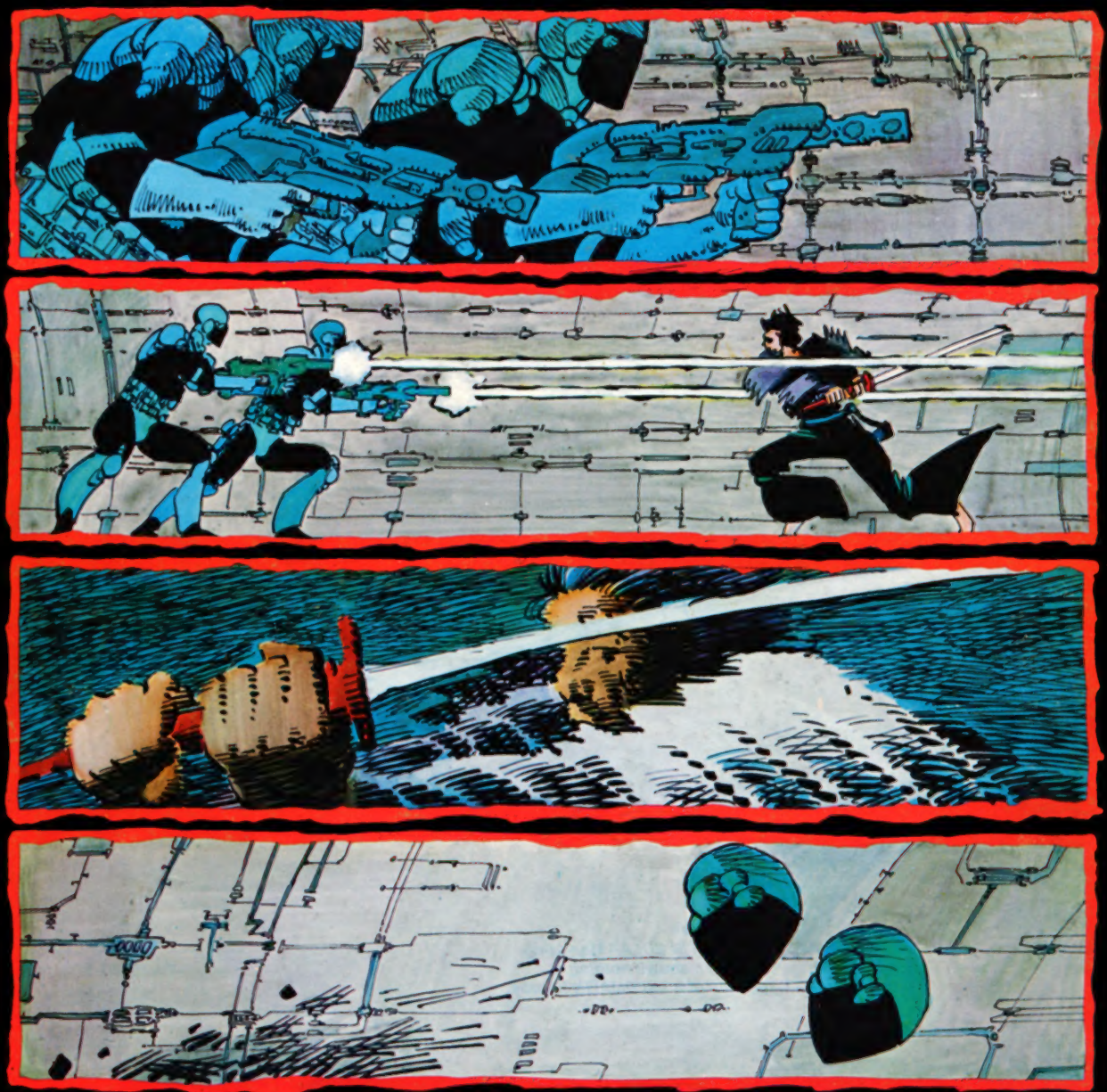

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